DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 229 606 CE 035 960

AUTHOR Evans, Norman
TITLE Curriculum Opportunity. A Map of Experiential Learning in Entry Requirements to Higher and Further Education Award Bearing Courses. a Project Report.
INSTITUTION Further Education Unit, London (England).
REPORT NO ISBN-0-946469-25-3
PUB DATE May 83
NOTE 98p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Admission Criteria; Certification; *College Admission; *College Credits; Comparative Analysis; Educational Certificates; *Educational Policy; *Educational Practices; *Experiential Learning; Higher Education; National Surveys; Needs Assessment; *Prerequisites; Prior Learning; Program Implementation; Questionnaires; State of the Art Reviews; Student Evaluation; Trend Analysis
IDENTIFIERS *United Kingdom; United States

ABSTRACT

A study examined the policies and practices that higher educational institutions in the United Kingdom have adopted towards experiential learning as a means of fulfilling entrance requirements. Included among the major activities of the project were a comparative analysis of United Kingdom and United States policies and practices with respect to experiential learning and admission into degree programs; a review of the rules and regulations pertaining to admission into degree-awarding higher and continuing educational programs in the United Kingdom; and a survey regarding current policies towards experiential learning that was completed by 177 representatives from various polytechnics, colleges, and institutes of higher learning throughout the United Kingdom. Based on the survey and follow-up interviews, the author of the study concluded that, contrary to belief, most of those contacted do not regularly carry out assessment of experiential learning. Because he found surprisingly few examples of a systematic approach to the assessment of experiential learning, the researcher recommended the establishment of national as well as institutional policies in the area of experiential learning. In addition, he called for regional consortia, expanded educational brokerage services, and pilot schemes to develop and evaluate strategies for the more widespread consideration of experiential learning when evaluating candidates who are applying for admission into degree-granting higher educational programs. (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED229606

FURTHER EDUCATION UNIT

A Project Report

Curriculum opportunity

A map of experiential learning in entry requirements to higher and further education award bearing courses

Norman Evans
Policy Studies Institute

CE 035960

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J Mansell

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ISBN 0 946469 25 3
May 1983

Printed by Lithosphere Printing Cooperative Ltd. (TU)

FURTHER EDUCATION UNIT

Elizabeth House York Road London SE1 7PH Telephone 01-928-9222 ext

Chairman J.G. Owen CBE

Chief Officer: Jack Mansell MEd CEng FIEE MIMech E

Chief Education Officers
Principals of FE Establishments
Secretaries of Regional and FE
Examining Bodies
Press, and
Other Interested Institutions/Individuals

Dear Sir/Madam

"CURRICULUM OPPORTUNITY - A MAP OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING..."

I enclose a copy of a project report resulting from a study carried out on our behalf by Norman Evans. It was funded by the DES PICKUP programme, but its relevance to the FHE system is much wider, hence its dissemination as a general report.

Experiential learning is defined in this report as the knowledge and skills acquired through life, work-experience and study, not formally attested through formal certification; and in Chapter 1, Norman Evans indicates how this concept has been used and developed in the US. He then comprehensively reviews UK policies and practices in this area. He describes these as patchy, sometimes ill-informed and not always in the best interests of students. He found "little or no clear evidence that institutions recognised the need for agreed and reliable procedures for assessing experiential learning so that it can be formally accredited for admission". Similarly, of those major validating bodies who encourage institutions to admit "unqualified" applicants, none appears to give guidance how this might be done.

In general, he finds that the FHE system, LEAs and central bodies, could be more flexible - even within current regulations. Thus in Chapter 4, he calls for initiatives from a range of bodies, including the FEU; describes a variety of overseas practices that might be studied; and mentions some examples that can be found in the UK.

The FEU regards this as an important document. The evidence quoted tends to indicate that experiential learning in the UK is undervalued and thus under-exploited - not only by educators and employers but also by the learners themselves. The evidence from other countries indicates that positive and systematic policies for the accreditation of experiential learning tends to increase rather than reduce the demand for conventional FE courses. This is not only good for business but it also helps to bridge a few gaps between education and living. We hope to do more work in this area, and interested bodies are invited to contact me.

Yours faithfully

Jack Mansell

JACK MANSELL
Chief Officer

A Company limited by guarantee. Registered Office: Elizabeth House, York Road, London SE1 7PH. Registered Number 1688702 England

Board of Management

Chairman	**J G Owen CBE** Chief Education Officer, Devon
Members	**J C N Baillie** National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education
	Mr T R Clendon Manpower Services Commission, Training Services Division
	J Deboo Confederation of British Industry
	E L Ellison Association of Principals of Colleges Association of Colleges of Further and Higher Education
	R J Hartles Association of Metropolitan Authorities
	R Jackson Trades Union Congress
	J Morris Association of County Councils
	E Norris HMI Department of Education and Science
	L Rees Welsh Joint Education Committee
	C R Walker Department of Education and Science
Observers	**Dr F D Duffin** Department of Education, Northern Ireland
	J F Mann Schools Council
	P C Webb Welsh Office Education Department
Secretary	**Jack Mansell** Chief Officer, Further Education Unit

The objects for which the **Further Education Unit (FEU)** is established are to promote, encourage and develop the efficient provision of further education in the United Kingdom and for that purpose:

a) to review and evaluate the range of existing further education curricula and programmes and to identify overlap, duplication, deficiences and inconsistencies therein;

b) to determine priorities for action to improve the provision of further education and to make recommendations as to how such improvement can be effected;

c) to carry out studies in further education and to support investigations of and experimentation in, and the development of further education curricula and to contribute to and assist in the evaluation of initiatives in further education;

d) to disseminate and publish information and to assist in the dissemination and publication of information about recommendations for and experiments and developments in further education.

The publications in this series of Reports are intended to inform teachers and others and to stimulate professional discussion about matters of concern to the FE service. The views expressed are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Units Board of Management.
A limited number of extra copies of this report are available from

Publications Despatch Centre,
Department of Education and Science,
Honeypot Lane, Canons Park,
Stanmore, Middlesex HA7 1AZ.
Tel: 01-952 2366 Ext 503

© Further Education Unit (FEU) 1983

Reproduction in whole or in part of the contents of this publication is authorised for all non-commercial educational purposes, provided the source is acknowledged.
All rights reserved with regard to commercial reproduction of the contents.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Abstract of Project	viii
	Paragraphs
INTRODUCTION	1-9
Methodology of Study	4-8
Subjective judgements	9
CHAPTER 1: A REVIEW OF THE CONCEPT OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING	10-24
Definition of Experiential Learning	10-12
Prior, Unsponsored and Sponsored Learning	13-14
Prior Learning: some developments which can follow	15-17
Characteristics of Experiential Learning	18-23
Experience and Learning	24
CHAPTER 2: POLICIES AND PRACTICES	25-84
The Heart of the Enquiry	25-26
Categories of Institutions polled and of returns	27-28
Visits to Institutions	29-31
Institutional decisions	32
Effect on Institutions of CNAA validation	33
Effect on Institutions of BEC and TEC validation	34
Academic Self Government and Further Education Colleges	35-38
Policies for 'strong' Academic Boards	39
Policies for 'weak' Academic Boards	40
Policies for 'in-between' Academic Boards	41
University and CNAA policies	42-47
Institutional Policies and BEC	48-49
Institutional Policies and TEC	50-53
Market Influences on Access Policy	54-56
Institutional practices	57-58
Institutional practices in university validated colleges	59
Institutional practices in other colleges	60-64
Institutional practices in CCETSW	65-67
Institutional practices in NNEB	68-71
Institutional practices and CGLI	72-73
Institutional practices and RSA	74
Institutional practices and REB	75
Part-Time Students	76-78
Interviewing	79-81
Limitations and practices as identified	82-84
CHAPTER 3: COMMENTARY AND INSTANCES OF GOOD PRACTICE	85-115
No instances of good practice discovered	85-86
Limitations of interviewing	87-89
The best instances	90-93
Institutions' use of existing regulations	94-95
Need for Institutional Policies	96-100
Institutional perceptions of awarding bodies	101-111
Experiential Learning is not an open question	112-115

	Paragraphs
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS	116-144
Significance of Experiential Learning	116-120
The Case for assessment of Experiential Learning	121-122
General possibilities for action	123
Examples from the United States	124-129
Significance for adults of assessment of Experiential Learning	130
Suggestions for Action:	131-144
Enlarging and widening participation	131
National Policy	132-134
What Institutions can do	135-136
Consortia	137
Academic brokerage services	138
What Validating Bodies can do	139-142
Need for Pilot Schemes	143
Initiatives to be taken	144

	PAGE
APPENDIX 1: Glossary	51
APPENDIX 2: Review and Appraisal of Regulations	53
Universities	53
Council for National Academic Awards	60
Business Education Council	64
Technician Education Council	66
Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work: Certificate of Qualification in Social Work	70
Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work: Certificate in Social Service	72
Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work: Preliminary Certificate in Social Care	73
National Nursery Examination Board	74
City and Guilds	75
Regional Examining Bodies	76
Royal Society of Arts	77
APPENDIX 3: Introductory letter to Institutions and Questionnaire	79
APPENDIX 4: Assessment of Experiential Learning	85
APPENDIX 5: Institutional Collaboration - Example from the United States	89

Final Report of 'Curriculum Opportunity: a map of experiential learning in higher and further education award bearing courses'

Abstract of project

i) To review the concept of experiential learning.

ii) To describe and appraise ways in which experiential learning is recognised for admission to award bearing courses up to and including first degree, including that of the Open University, TEC, BEC, City and Guilds from Part II upwards, CCETSW, NNEB, RSA and UEI, etc., from a review of the documentary evidence contained in the rules and regulations for those courses.

iii) To establish the practice of institutions working under those regulations, through questionnaire and follow-up visits to a sample of institutions.

iv) To inquire into the views of validating bodies and institutions of both regulations and current practice.

v) To make suggestions with respect to possible further developments in policy and practice.

INTRODUCTION

1. The basic methodology for this mapping project, Curriculum Opportunity: a map of experiential learning in entry requirements to higher and further education award bearing courses was desk work - documentary studies. It had to be, given the time and money availiable. There was a two-pronged thrust to this desk work: to try and establish the policies institutions had adopted towards experiential learning in access provisions within the regulations for each award bearing course, and to go on and ask for accounts of their practices - what the policies meant for men and women who applied for places.

2. Furnished with that information, the follow-up visits to as many institutions as possible - what might be called the topographical studies for mapping - could take inquiries deeper, through discussing with staff what they had written about policies and practice when completing the questionnaires against the background of their day-to-day work in the institution.

3. Putting desk and field work together, even at the very best, this project could do no more than produce a rather small scale road map with all its deficiencies compared with an Ordnance Survey. The hope is that it is better than no map at all.

Methodology of Study

4. The first task for the work of the project was to compile a register of the courses provided and examination opportunities offered in all higher and further education institutions in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. None existed. This register was completed by recording against the institutions listed in DES List III, November 1981, information supplied by the various awarding bodies. For CNAA, BEC, CCETSW and NNEB that was a straightforward matter of matching one list with another. For TEC it meant working from a three inch thick computer printout since the TEC register is arranged by courses rather than by institutions. Neither CGLI nor the REBs nor RSA record separately further education institutions in their lists of centres. For CGLI that meant working from an Education Directory which had been annotated for internal purposes. For the REBs it meant asking some secretaries to annotate their lists. RSA was different again. It provided a complete set of addressed envelopes to all their centres at home and abroad, from which the FE institutions could be extracted. Without this help from TEC, CGLI, REBs and RSA no register could have been compiled. The Standing Conference on University Entrance provided a list giving information about each university. The register was the essential basic tool for the job. At a glance it shows what is offered, by whom and where, on the list

grouped by LEA areas. The composition of the questionnaires was based on it, as was the selection of follow-up visits. That work, which took some five weeks, was based on initial conversations with officers of the awarding bodies which provided an initial briefing on their varying positions in relation to the accreditation of experiential learning for entry and remission of courses.

5. The next stage was to study the rules and regulations of each of the awarding bodies to establish the first source of evidence for the project. This served three purposes. It provided essential quotations of rules and regulations to be used in the questionnaires. It formed the basis for Appendix 2 of the report 'to describe and appraise' from a 'review of the documentary evidence contained in the rules and regulations for those courses'. And it indicated the stance taken by the awarding bodies. Each section of Appendix 2 has been submitted to the body concerned for clearance as to its accuracy, and for comment on the appraisals. The responsibility for the appraisals is mine.

6. The questionnaires contained three sections. The first quoted the current regulations for each course. The second asked for statements about policies concerning the regulations which had been formally adopted, whether at Principal or Executive level, Academic Board/Academic Council, Faculty, Department Course Tutor/Course Committee or Admission Tutors. The third referred to College practices: 'Please describe the procedures followed in admission to courses showing how experiential learning is considered as a factor in making decisions about admissions.' The questionnaire was then piloted through several institutions, polytechnics and colleges, as a dummy run, and suitably revised. Appendix 3 contains the introductory letter and one questionnaire - that relating to CNAA - as an example.

7. The next stage was to decide which instititutions were to be asked to help the work of the project by being invited to complete the questionnaires. They were selected according to the category of institutions, the range of their curricula and geographical distribution. The table on page 7 shows how that worked out, though no indication is given there of the geographical distribution. It also shows the numbers responding. A subsequent chapter tells something of the problems encountered for institutions and so for the work of the project.

8. The completed questionnaires again served two purposes. They provided some of the material on institutional policies and practices and information on how institutions used the powers given them in the regulations for entry for the various awards. They pointed the

way to those institutions which should be visited for gleaning additional material from discussion with the members of staff responsible for working with applicants and students, to complement that given in the responses to the questionnaires. Again, in drawing up a schedule of visits, attempts were made to take account of regional differences by visiting institutions in as many parts of the country as possible.

Subjective judgements

9. There is one important preliminary remark to make about the report. Apart from those sections recording the official regulations and where institutions have clearly and officially established procedures, subjective judgements enter. Whether it is staff completing questionnaires or my reading of them, or the conversations I had during visits, the subjective element is there. So ultimately, however carefully I have tried to make professional judgements, the reader must rely on his or her own judgement about what this report has to say about the accreditation of experiential learning for entry to award bearing courses in further education.

Norman Evans

CHAPTER 1

A REVIEW OF THE CONCEPT OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Definition of Experiential Learning

10. For this project, experiential learning means the knowledge and skills acquired through life and work experience and study which are not formally attested through any educational or professional certification. It can include instruction based learning, provided by any institution, which has not been examined in any of the public examination systems. It can include those undervalued elements of formally provided education which are not encompassed by current examinations. It is a definition specially designed to identify a category of learning which can be included among others as evidence on which decisions can be taken for admission to award-bearing courses in further and higher education. It refers only to learning acquired according to the definition before entry to any course. It does not refer therefore to any form of experiential learning which comes from planned experience and is somehow assessed as part of a course by an education institution. It is not concerned with opportunities for using experience for participatory learning. It is concerned with opportunities for entering courses, and for gaining remission of study to shorten a course.

11. Immediately the critical questions which arise are: what has been learned, and how can we know what has been learned? In other words, assessment procedures. It is no part of this project to investigate the niceties of assessment procedures. Part of the work was to collect information about the ways institutions take account of experiential learning in their admission procedures and it is clear that no reliable procedures have been developed such as could be recommended confidently for general use. Some survey of current practice is given. But some few comments on assessment procedures are offered here, for an attempt to review the concept of experiential learning would be inadequate without them.

12. Two categories of experiential learning are mentioned in paragraph 10: learning acquired before entering a course of study - the subject of the project; and learning which is within a course of study. There are obvious differences between them; there are also important similarities. The essential difference is that the learning a person acquires before studying a course is entirely outside the control, influence and responsibility of the institution which may wish to assess it. Learning acquired experientially during a course is part of the responsibility of the institution providing the course.

Prior, Unsponsored and Sponsored Learning

13. In the United States of America where the theory and practice of the assessment of experiential learning is advanced and sophisticated the distinction is drawn between the

two by referring to PRIOR LEARNING or UNSPONSORED LEARNING (what students bring with them) and SPONSORED LEARNING (what students acquire during a course). Since the provision for sponsored learning is the responsibility of the education institution, the assessment of what has been learned is governed by what the institution has had as its aims in providing the experience for its students. In most cases in Britain, sandwich courses included, these aims are not thought out systematically for all the kinds of learning intended, nor from a rationale asserting that they can best be achieved through experience. This general lack of definition must in part account for the absence of procedures for the assessment of experiential learning which is provided by institutions. This is particularly serious in courses which claim that theoretical and practical elements are integrated.

14. At first sight Prior Learning seems very different. There can be no defined learning objectives provided by the individual, let alone any education institution. But if learning has occurred, then it must be possible to assess it. This can be done without the help of clear, pre-determined aims or intentions for specific learning if the learner, helped by tutors and peers, moves steadily from descriptions of experiences, to the identification of what has been learned. Sources of that learning can be cited together with the means of verifying the experiences which led to learning as well as the learning itself. Institutions can then end up with documented statements of learning even though they had no part in facilitating that learning.

Prior Learning: some developments which can follow

15. Experience in the United States demonstrates how this view of prior learning can introduce flexibility and responsiveness into higher and further education provision. A documented statement of learning can, in exceptional cases, provide reliable academic evidence for deciding that the person submitting the statement has fulfilled all the learning requirements for being awarded the qualification in question. In large numbers of cases the academic credits granted on the basis of a documented statement exempt applicants from considerable parts of a programme of study. This is an extension of the customary way of considering admission with advanced standing in this country.

16. One step further is for an educational institution - Thomas Edison College in New Jersey, for example, or a new institution - see the Compact for Lifelong Educational Opportunities in Appendix 5 - to provide an academic brokerage service for those who wish to submit themselves to the intellectual demands required in producing evidence of experiential learning for assessment. Once a recommended academic value has been placed on evidence of learning expressed as a number of academic credits in the American system, the 'student' is free to take it to any institution which will accept it.

17. Prior learning as a means of awarding advanced standing to admission and the brokerage of prior learning suggest possible ways of relating learning acquired from work experience and from 'in house' courses provided by employers to the formal education system and award bearing courses.

Characteristics of Experiential Learning

18. The similarity between unsponsored and sponsored experiential learning is that experience is being used systematically as a source of learning. Whether learning was intentional or not, the two sets of assessment procedures are bound to have much in common in that they are both concerned with either non-classroom based learning or with learning which has not been formally tested. When assessment of experiential learning is set in the context of formal education provision, some redefining of education itself is taking place. All of a person's learning comes into the reckoning, not just those elements of learning with a recognisable experiential base.

19. Everyone's learning includes affective as well as cognitive learning. The assessment of experiential learning raises questions about both. Just as it is difficult to think of any learning which does not have an experiential element, so it is as difficult to think of any learning which is not a mixture of the cognitive and the affective. The assessment of what has been learned from experience focusses attention on affective learning because of the nature of experience itself. So attempts to assess experiential learning will tend to pay more attention to affective knowledge than is commonly done in assessments of classroom learning. And since a common complaint about education at all levels is that it concentrates on cognitive knowledge and rarely accepts affective knowledge as an equal and necessary partner, any systematic consideration of experiential learning highlights a central part of the debate about the purposes of education. The recognition of all of the person's learning for assessment is a short step away from asking what all of a person's learning can be, or can become.

20. There is another implication. The narrowness of the working definition in the first paragraph is obvious when the question is asked - is there any learning which does not have some experiential component? One way or another all learning is an experience, and experience is the source of experiential learning. Sitting listening in a class or doing paper and pen exercises in class, all are experiences. Those experiences are very different however from the thrust of saying that the essential point of experiential learning is that it is experience-led learning. Implicitly that is arguing for experiential learning of a deliberate kind. But as Melvin Tumin puts it 'the important question is not that of classroom learning versus experiential learning, but rather of proper learning versus inadequate

learning and superficial learning, whether in class or out(1). It follows that we can try to improve the education of all students with a sound concept of experiential learning, as well as try to improve traditional forms of learning for those who seem less able for a variety of reasons to make the grade in the present modalities. Everyday experience offers a clue here. It is often the case that the learning from formal study is increased, even extended, when experience, however accidental, follows that formal study.'

21. All this is in line with what Dewey wrote in Childhood and Society in 1902:

> No number of object lessons, got up as object lessons for the sake of giving information can afford even the shadow of a substitute for acquaintance with the plants and animals of the farm and garden acquired through actual living among them and caring for them ... Verbal memory can be trained in committing tasks, a certain discipline of reasoning powers can be acquired through lessons in science and mathematics, but, after all, this is somewhat remote and shadowy compared with the training of attention and of judgement that is acquired in having to do things with a real motive behind and a real outcome ahead.

22. In our own times the United States has tried to come to terms with a wide but uncoordinated expansion of the uses of experiential learning in higher education which occurred in the early seventies. Morris Keeton, the President of the Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning (CAEL) says experiential learning 'is when the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied, involving not merely observations but doing something with it'. That was his educational principle on which the Council's work was based. 'CAEL in short was to contribute to the improvement of policies and methods of assessment of extra classroom learning in order to assist in turn suppliers and consumers of education to do their respective tasks in learning better.'

23. Writing seventy years apart, Dewey and Keeton are pointing to the same comprehensive view of learning. They are talking about experiential education. They are asserting that education is incomplete and less effective without opportunities for learners to be 'directly in touch with the realities being studied'. They serve notice that the narrowness of the working definition used here indicates the narrowness of the project itself. If experiential learning is to be explored adequately as a source of improved educational strategies to assist 'suppliers and consumers of education to do their respective tasks in learning better', then experiential education is the quarry. According to Melvin Tumin:

> One can think of six groups of people for whom some concession of experiential learning might therefore provide an opportunity to learn things not learned and to learn things

---

(1) Melvin Tumin in Experiential Learning, Morris Keeton and Associates, Josey Bass, 1977.

well that might otherwise be learned poorly: all those who succeed relatively well in school by traditional criteria; those who fail, relatively speaking; those who drop out early for one reason or another; those who are bored even if successful; those who are not in school but want to continue growing; and those who are not now in school but want to return.

As he says, that amounts to large numbers of people.

Experience and Learning

24. It is important to distinguish between experience and learning. Learning is under consideration; not any experience which may have generated learning. Without that distinction, discussion about experiential learning is confused. The work of this project has demonstrated this confusion repeatedly. Those who are worried by, if not downright suspicious of, the concept of the assessment of experiential learning can argue that experience is not an acceptable academic criteria for admission to courses. They then tend to assume that is the end of the matter, that they have demolished the case for the academic assessment of the experiential learning. They have done nothing of the kind. They have simply not accepted that it is the learning from experience which matters, not the experience itself. That distinction between experience and what has been learned through experience is the beginning of the matter for experiential learning. Thus, to set out to assess experiential learning is to begin to reassess education itself.

CHAPTER 2
POLICIES AND PRACTICES

The Heart of the Enquiry

25. Policies and practices concerning experiential learning in access provision have to be considered in four broad categories of institutions: universities, polytechnics, colleges and institutes of higher education, and colleges of further education; and four categories of awarding bodies. Six awarding bodies - CNAA, BEC, TEC, NNEB, CGLI and RSA - provide a national service for institutions in each category, except for universities. One, CCETSW, provides a national service for all four categories of institution. Seventeen universities work with twenty-five colleges and institutes of higher education as an extension of their own academic affairs. There are eight Regional Examining bodies offering services used mainly by colleges of further education within their geographical area. And there is the Open University, appropriately a fifth category on its own. Appendix 2 gives for each award-bearing course an abstract of the relevant regulations for entry, the numbers at entry for 1980/81, and a brief appraisal.

26. Inevitably, there is a wide variety in both policies and practices. However, the polytechnics, colleges and institutes of higher education and colleges of further education, CNAA, BEC and TEC lie at the heart of this enquiry. As is clear from the chapter 'Review and Appraisal', the universities, and so the institutions validated by them, are not significantly concerned with the accreditation of experiential learning. As examining bodies the CGLI, REBs and RSA are not directly concerned either. CCETSW and NNEB feature prominently in institutional policies and practices. But CCETSW courses for CQSW and CSS are circumscribed by rules about ages and categories of students as conditions to be met for course approval, so that there is little room for institutions to develop policies covering experiential learning and admissions. It can be somewhat different for the PCSE, although there, as we shall see, there can be different constraints. The small numbers of older students on NNEB courses mean that policies about experiential learning for that course are hardly much of an issue for institutions.

Categories of Institutions polled and of Returns

27. For England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Table 1 sets out the numbers of the different categories of institutions in the register compiled at the beginning of the project, the numbers and categories of institutions invited to help and which received questionnaires, and the number of institutions which returned answers, either in the questionnaire or by letter. It also shows, by named courses (CNAA, BEC and so on), the number of questionnaires sent out and the number returned.

Table 1: Institutions and Courses Offered

	Total on Register	No. of Institutions to whom Questionnaires were sent		Univ. validated Degree	CNAA	BEC	TEC	CQCW	CSS	PCSC	NNEB	C&G	REB	RSA
Polytechnics	31	31	sent	-	31	31	31	23	4	0	0	0	4	11
		29	replied		22	15	15	9	-	-	-	-	-	2
		94%	%		71	48	48	39						18
Colleges and Institutes of Higher Education (Degree Teaching)	58	58	sent	20	38	43	53	10	19	9	9	26	13	25
		48	replied	10	35	11	7	3	9	3	4	5	-	6
		83%	%	50	92	26	13	30	47	33	44	19		24
College	404	147	sent	0	0	147	147	5	33	61	83	138	66	123
		100	replied		-	42	51	-	11	20	36	43	13	36
		68%	%	-		29	35		33	33	43	31	20	29
Total	493	236												

Note: Universities do not feature in this table for reasons given in the Review and Appraisal.
All percentages are of the total number of questionnaires sent out.

28. The picture is patchy. A number of institutions, mainly colleges of further education, declined to help, being overwhelmed with reorganisation schemes of one kind or another and with incessant meetings to cope with budgetary problems which LEAs passed on to them. A handful declined saying politely or aggressively that they thought the whole thing was a waste of time. The mailing to each institution contained an explanatory letter to the Principal or Director and a separate set of questionnaires for each course being offered in the institution (see Appendix 3). So, for example, as the table shows, among the 236 mailings there were nine questionnaires for PCSC sent to colleges and institutes of further education. Each questionnaire had an addressed envelope attached to it. The idea was to enable the person who was to complete the questionnaire to return it when completed without bothering institutions with internal collating. Some answers were evidently gathered up centrally and mailed back as a package. Others were not, and came back in penny numbers as expected. And some questionnaires did not return at all. That means that whereas, for example, a hundred colleges of further education responded in one way or another, only 42 returned their BEC questionnaires, showing a 29 per cent response and 36 sent replies about NNEB, showing 43 per cent return. Patchy though the picture may be, there is a sufficient number of responses both from the differing categories of institutions and in respect of the various courses to make a reasonable basis for report and commentary.

Visits to Institutions

29. In all there were 18 visits, four for polytechnics, four for colleges and institutes of higher education, and ten for colleges of further education. They ranged from the North East to the far South West; from Northern Ireland to London via South Wales. Some of the institutions visited offered most courses, some a more limited number. Some were rural, others urban; some in relatively affluent areas and some in run-down locations. And they covered every kind of policy and practice as revealed through the questionnaires. Unfortunately the uncertainties of rail-travel meant revising the programme of visits several times so that in the event there were fewer visits than originally planned. But they topped the ten per cent sample.

30. What, then, do institutions have to say about their policies? There is no common denominator. No institution had any policy specifically concerned with the assessment of experiential learning. A few refer to its accreditation - without of course policies for its assessment.

31. For each course those completing the questionnaire were asked to cite any formally adopted policies and say whether a policy was decided at Principal or Executive level or at Academic Board, Faculty Board where such existed, Department, Course Committee or Admission Tutor level. Some questionnaires had no entry to the policy

section. Others simply quoted regulations of the course. Some policies quoted positively welcomed mature students whether qualified or not, which is not the same as having a policy concerning experiential learning. In most cases policy was attributed to two or more different levels within an institution indicating some form of delegation.

Institutional decisions

32. To some extent the entries in Table 2 (p.16-17) reflect the differences between the various courses and their regulations. But it reveals more than that. It represents the meeting point of established institutional habits and practices with the regulations of different courses. Given the four broad categories of institutions and four categories of award bearing authorities, differences are hardly surprising.

Effect on Institutions of CNAA Validation

33. Three vital developments lie behind these differences: validation by CNAA of degree programmes, validation by BEC and TEC, and academic self-government. Seeking validation from CNAA for a degree programme means demonstrating to a group of academic peers that an institution is sufficiently self-reliant to manage its own academic affairs without recourse to outside hierarchies and that its academic staff is competent to design courses from top to bottom, to accept the responsibility of deciding who is fit to study the course as students, how they are to study it, and who meets the required standards to pass at the end of the course. There is careful guidance set out in the various CNAA documents. But the responsibility rests with the institution. This sets up a pollination system. Like bees, academic staff with that experience buzz off to other institutions or teach on other courses and fertilize where they alight. For it is the case that generally, institutions and staff with experience of degree teaching adopt a more thoughtful approach to experiential learning than those without that experience. They have had to develop comprehensive institutional policies of their own.

Effect on Institutions of BEC and TEC Validation

34. There is a contrary tendency particularly noticeable in colleges of further education. BEC and TEC similarly have thrust considerable responsibility on institutions for designing their own courses. But sometimes this validation requirement conflicts with former experience of relying on outside bodies for course content and examinations. Whatever they may or may not be now, further education colleges have developed largely through teaching students so that they could pass external examinations. To an extent therefore, and for a long time, they had limited responsibility for the content of courses. They were teaching to requirements of examining bodies and their prime responsibility was to see to it that their students passed. Admission policies tended to look after themselves. Either students (usually men) were nominated by employers and the colleges took them, or

the recommended educational levels for admission were taken as the best guidance on how to get students through the examinations, taught by specialist departments which tended to run their own show within the institution. Hierarchical departments taught students for examinations of another hierarchy. In some institutions this experience influences policies and practices concerning experiential learning and provision for access to courses. So when it comes to discussing the accreditation of experiential learning in the light of the discretionary powers given to institutions in the entry regulations of TEC and BEC the responses from colleges of further education are as varied as the rainbow's colours.

Academic Self Government and Further Education Colleges

35. There is a third factor at work influencing the development of policies and practices in general which affect the overall question of the accreditation of experiential learning. The 1966 Weaver Report on the Government of Colleges of Education sought to establish academic self-government for the non-university section of higher education. Instruments and articles of government had to be approved by the Department of Education and Science. Approval was only given when the composition and powers of an academic board were consistent with its role as the academic master of the institution. Everything was epitomised by the principal being chairman of an academic board and subject to it. Simultaneously the DES insisted on polytechnics having similar academic arrangements, sometimes despite stiff resistance from maintaining local authorities. This means that within the scope of this inquiry there are 31 polytechnics and 58 colleges and institutes of higher education, most of which originated in colleges of education, teaching degree programmes with academic boards which have been required to develop policies and authorise procedures for every aspect of their academic work, whether their courses have been validated by CNAA or a university.

36. Among the colleges of further education, the development of academic self-government has been less marked. There is a tendency for the relative autonomy of specialist departments to continue, blending an authoritarian hierarchy with representative democracy in academic boards which can be, more frequently than in other institutions, more of a reporting committee than a place where policies are settled and officially adopted. And in some colleges of further education there is no academic board at all. There may be merely an academic advisory committee. Transactions may be between head of department, Principal and LEA.

37. Policies are more readily identified when 'strong' academic boards are at work. That does not necessarily mean that where there are 'weak' academic boards, policies concerning the accreditation of experiential learning are less appropriate or effective. That may be the case. The point is that it is much harder to find out what is really going on. (See Table 2.)

Table 2: Total responses to policy questions

Key: A = principal or executive; B = academic board/council; C = faculty; D = department; E = course committee or tutor; /= division between institutional answers; - = no entry under policy

	POLYTECHNIC	COLLEGE AND INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION	COLLEGES OF FURTHER EDUCATION
CNAA	BC/CE/BCDE/ACDE/ACD/-/C/ BCDE/-/BE	EB/EB/DE/B/E/B/AB/E/-/C/ AD/E/BCD/BE/CE/	
UD		E/B/-/Univ./E Univ./E/E/ Univ.E/Univ./-/Univ./	
BEC EA		DE/D/CE/CE/ABDE/	D/ADE/D/ADE E/ABCD/-/D/-/DE/D/E/A/ADE/AE AE/D/-/E/DE/-/-/E/D/-/D/-/E/D/E/D/DE
BEC NA		D/-/DE/	D/E/
BEC HND	BC/E/-/ACD/DE/E/BE/	C/-/-/E/E/E/	D/
TEC C	E/AE/CD/BE/BDE/E/BDE	-/E/D/-/C/D/E/E/	DE/AD/DE CE/DE/A/D/ABCE/D/D/DE/-/-/-/ADE/D/BDE D/-/D/D/D/DE/ABCDE/D/D/ABCDE D/A/CD/D/-/-/E/ADE/D/D/AD/D/BDE
TEC D	ACD/BCDE/ABCDE/	BCDE/	E

Table 2: (continued)

Key: A = principal or executive; B = academic board/council; C = faculty; D = department; E = course committee or tutor; / = division between institutional answers; - = no entry under policy

	POLYTECHNIC	COLLEGE AND INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION	COLLEGES OF FURTHER EDUCATION
TEC H	BE/		
CQSW	E/BCDE/E/E/E/DE/E/	E/CE/ABCDE/	
CSS		E/-/-/CDE/long doc/ college reps/	E/AE/E/-/DE/AE
PSCS		E/D/E/	ABCD/E/E/E/CE/ADE/E/ABDE/-/-/-/DE/D/D/
NNEB		E/NNEB Guidelines/-/	-/ABCD/E/E/-/E/-/DE/-/DE/E/E/-/DE -/E/D/E/E/E/D/E/-/-/E/D/E/D/
CG		D/E/-/D/-/-/	ABCD/D/D/DE/D/D/D/DE/DE/D/D/A/-/ DE/D/E/E/ADE/ABD/D/BDE/CD/E/DE/-/ DE/D/E/DE/-/D/D/ADE/D/AD/D/-/
REB	-/	-/	DE/-/DE/D/BD/D/DE/D/
RSA	E/	-/ED/E/DE/E/	E/E/D/D/DE/E/A/ABDE/-/ADE/-/E -/E/D/-/-/-/D/-/DE/-/DE/D/D/DE/ -/D/D/DE/D/

38. So the policies quoted ranged from formally adopted academic papers which establish a centralised sequence of procedures so that every academic administrator knows exactly what is involved and how responsibility for admissions has been assigned, to loose arrangements with heads of departments passing responsibility to course tutors - delegation is too deliberate a description of some of the passings-on - who may be working in separate buildings with inadequate facilities and secretarial support, rushed off their feet, especially in registering part-time students at the beginning of a session, often feeling somewhat isolated and lacking the security which can come from a sense of collegial coherence. Some examples will make this clear.

Policies for 'strong' Academic Boards

39. Extract from the Statement of Intent agreed by Academic Board and Governing Body:

> 'Entry to the Institute.
> The institution is committed to exploring ways of entry into higher education for those students whose previous background, experience and attainment make it harder for them to recognise the advantages of and respond to the demands of higher education. It will facilitate entry of mature students.....'

Academic Council minute:

> 'Special, Concessional, Entry to Courses.
> Any applications for special, concessional, entry to courses that fall into the following categories shall be referred by the Head of School concerned with a case for admission to the Academic Registrar. Normally an immediate decision will be given, but the Academic Registrar may consult with Deans and/or other Heads of Schools about a particular application. If an application is rejected the reasons for rejection will be given to the Head of School. Applications arising during the Academic Registrar's absence are to be referred in the usual way to his office where arrangements will be made for the application to be dealt with, on his behalf, by the appropriate Dean of Faculty.
>
> 1. Mature students not less than twenty-one years of age who, although they have not the usual entry qualifications for first degree and equivalent courses, have shown exceptional ability in appropriate or professional fields, or who are able to show, by whatever means is deemed most appropriate, that they have achieved competence in their chosen field of study sufficient to justify admission.
> 2. A waiver of particular course entry requirements.
> 3. A waiver of the general entry requirements for an applicant under the age of twenty-one.
> 4. Where the equivalence of foreign or unusual qualifications cannot be directly or authoritatively established.
> 5. Entry to the Part Two or second or subsequent year of a course where definite provision has not been made in the course scheme.'

Statement on policy:

> 'The Academic Board issues and keeps under review the institution's admission policy. This includes a section on the admission of applicants who lack the prescribed entry qualifications.

It is understood that some applicants may be admitted who do not possess the prescribed entry qualifications. Admissions Tutors are, however, expected to satisfy themselves as far as possible that such applicants have the necessary motivation, potential and knowledge to follow their proposed programme of study successfully. Applicants may be asked to present evidence which, in the opinion of the Admissions Tutor, indicates that they are likely to be able to achieve the specific objectives of the scheme. They may also be asked to submit to a specially arranged assessment, which may involve their sitting an entrance examination or writing essays or taking practical tests in a workshop or laboratory.'

Policies for 'weak' Academic Boards

40. Those are all examples where strong Academic Boards are at work. At the other end of the scale there are some other ways of looking at policy:

'No policies have been formally taken in the college or in the borough.'

'This item is being discussed at this time.'

'It (experiential learning) is neither required nor sought.'

'Our principal does not encourage exceptional entry of students under twenty-five.'

'There is no Academic Board. An Academic Advisory Committee has been recently formed. Its function is purely advisory and therefore has no control over policies for admission of students.'

Policies for 'in between' Academic Boards

41. In between, there is a variety of other approaches to policy:

A prospectus states:

'The Principal must be satisfied with a candidate's ability and qualifications before admission is granted to any course. For certain professional and technician courses minimum academic entry qualifications are imposed by the various professional and examining bodies. These are usually specified in terms of GCE or CSE passes in appropriate subjects; details will be found under the departmental entries in the prospectus.'

'Policy has been to include in courses at higher level (BEC Higher National Certificate) formal recognition of experiential learning through work-related residential courses. Such courses carried out over a period of three days are designed to place the students in work-related situations demanding adaptability, decision making and the development of inter-personal skills.'

'The Academic Board has established a college TEC committee. One of its functions is to vet students with discretionary entry qualifications and make proposals to the course tutor on future monitoring of student progress.'

'Exceptional entry qualifications are accepted by the Principal or by a nominated person(s).'

'It is the policy of the Department to allow mature students entrance to certificate courses. I would point out that this is a continuation of the policy that was previously adopted when the department offered CGLI Technician courses.'

'The Principal's discretion is normally delegated to a department'.

Universities and CNAA policies

42. As indicated in Appendix 2, institutions whose courses are validated by a university have limited scope for determining admission policies. Here is an entry of college policy where degrees are validated by a university:

> 'The College's representatives on the Matriculation Committee of the University are the Assistant Director who is responsible for submitting applications for special admission. An applicant under the age of 23 would not be granted special matriculation on the basis of relevant work or life experience except under special circumstances. Applicants above the age of 23 are interviewed by Course Tutors in the relevant subjects and an application is submitted to the Matriculation Committee. It is rare for the Matriculation Committee not to accept the College's recommendations. Normally mature applicants will have shown their capacity for degree work by successfully completing some course of advanced study such as a professional examination or an Open University credit or an A.L. in the relevant subject but consideration is given to other factors such as the nature of work experience if there are occasions when a mature applicant without formal qualifications has been specially matriculated ... in 1981 a lorry driver without formal qualifications and a businessman without formal qualifications were both admitted to the degree course on the recommendation of the tutors who interviewed the candidates.'

43. Behind some of the answers to the policy questions lie some internal contradictions. For example one entry for policy said:

'Permission is obtained from CNAA'

and another said

'Cases are reported to CNAA'

Yet in discussion during visits both were contradicted by the tutors responsible for the courses. They did no such thing. Similar confusion occurs in some institutions over BEC regulations.

44. This leads naturally into the policies of institutions concerning the regulations of the awarding bodies. As a guiding rule it seems that the more academically demanding the work, the more visible and clear are the policies. The day to day requirements of recruiting, teaching, and examining degree students require them. Validation depends on clarity.

45. In a covering letter one polytechnic had this to say about policy:

> '... we are convinced of the need for a greater recognition and acceptance of work and life experience as qualifications for entry to higher education courses. In turn the Academic Board accords Departments and Course Boards discretionary powers in the exercise of judgement on 'exceptional admissions', i.e. determining the

validity of work/professional experience as alternatives to formal examination qualifications.

In terms of dealing with CNAA which validates all our degree courses we require each of our Course Boards to pay heed to the Council's official policy on exceptional admissions; a policy which you will be aware has been modified in recent years.

In terms of BEC and TEC courses we offer only those courses which lead to higher awards and consequently, the occasions for the exercise of judgement on relevant work/professional experience and admission criteria are few.'

The last point seems a questionable one, but the institutional stance in relation to the accreditation of experiential learning is clear.

46. On the other hand, policies for CGLI and RSA are almost invisible. With those courses, syllabuses are prescribed, external examinations are there to be passed, so things continue usually without benefit of consciously stated policies.

'I am not aware of any formal college policy' (of CGLI).

And for RSA:

'Experiential learning is not considered a factor in making decisions about admission to courses to which the Royal Society of Arts single subject examinations taken at this college relate. With regard to examination entries, no criteria are employed other than a candidate's ability to pay the requisite fee and the desire to undertake the single subject examination.'

47. In between there are significant policy differences in the response institutions make to the regulations of BEC, TEC, CCETSW and NNEB. For NNEB it emerges that institutions are not masters of their own recruitment. Arrangements with LEAs may impose limitations on the numbers of older applicants who may be admitted - so institutional policies are in effect ruled out. For CCETSW, CQSW and CSS are hardly susceptible to institutional policies for reasons given already, but PCSC is different, at least in some cases. Some institutions admit older applicants although the course is commonly held to be specifically appropriate for school leavers. Then experiential learning can count. In those cases policy is more likely to be the result of a course tutor or head of department with the support of the Principal coming to some agreement with the people concerned in LEA offices than of a college policy being clearly enunciated.

Institutional Policies and BEC

48. The BEC entry regulations offer two ways of overriding the recommended entry qualifications: exceptional entries for those under nineteen and twenty-one respectively for National and Higher National courses, and discretionary entries in the hands of the Principal for those over those ages. In no case did an institution cite as institutional policy anything other than a recital of BEC regulations. At departmental or course level there are many variations. Some use both facilities, some neither.

'BEC General. Full use is made of the discretionary powers available. Candidates are accepted for courses by tutors after interview.

BEC National. Few powers available but use made of nineteen class discretionary power and also exceptional registration method.

BEC Higher. Full use made of twenty-one class discretion where a student can show his/her experience is relevant.'

'As most students are on day-release facilities, their educational standard and work experience are taken into account in deciding whether or not to exercise discretion. If in doubt, employers are consulted as to the advisability of an employee starting upon a course of study which may be too demanding. A trial period is approved and if the student will clearly not make satisfactory progress by the time BEC registration is due on 15 December, he/she and the employer is advised to withdraw.'

49. And as with CNAA there are misconceptions of policy. One course tutor complained that although he wanted to help deserving applicants, if they did not possess the recommended qualifications there was no way he could enrol them. He was wrong. BEC regulations could help him; policy was muddled. There was a good deal of fear expressed that BEC would come down heavily if enrolment showed significant numbers of discretionary entries, let alone reluctance to go through the paperwork for exceptional entries which have to be submitted to BEC for decisions. Behind both reservations there sometimes lurked an anxiety about dropout numbers during the course and eventual results. There was an impression that institutions and tutors were more vulnerable to criticisms from BEC if unsatisfactory dropout numbers or results were related to exceptional or discretionary entries. All this bears heavily on policy. But, in fact, policy seemed secondary to the state of the application market, as will emerge later.

Institutional Policies and TEC

50. For TEC also, at institutional level there were no statements beyond quotations from TEC regulations and reference to the section in submissions for validation where an institution has to record its proposed procedures for dealing with unusual admissions. There were plenty of references to TEC committees, for example:

'Cases of unusual admission qualifications and credits will be decided by reference to the departmental TEC co-ordinating committee and the moderator.'

51. There seem to be two different policy approaches to the accreditation of experiential learning for TEC courses. Many heads of departments base their policies on the assumption that the nature of technical employment means that most employees who are sponsored by employers as students have a record which shows their progression from school along the City and Guilds path. This, combined with an employer's recommendation based

on performance at work, means that a college has no need to ask additional questions or seek evidence of what a potential student has learned from his or her work experience. It is taken as read, and the belief is that it is perfectly possible to fit students into the appropriate levels. In many ways, though, that is a variation of the market factors applying to BEC. If the majority of students - and this goes for full-time as well as part-time - are sponsored by employers, there is little room for institutional or departmental policies. Where an institution takes that view, it means that there is little chance of a student being given credit towards a TEC award on account of what he or she has learned previously, no matter how.

52. Other heads of department take a different view. They say that for older people, CGLI performance years ago is insufficient evidence of present attainments and that their deliberate policy is to enter students for higher-level units wherever possible and provide remedial or catch-up facilities in weaker areas. Not surprisingly, these institutions take a more positive line with awarding credit towards TEC awards:

> 'The Principal and the Management Team within the framework of our submissions to TEC, BEC, CCETSW, etc., encourage appropriate allowances and credits to be given for experience.'

53. Another factor which influences policies of institutions towards TEC is their size. It is easier for a large institution with hundreds of TEC students to find ways and means of meeting the needs of students whose experiential learning means that they do not fit snugly into existing units of work. One large college takes on older students on a trial and error basis, allowing them to move from one level to another as they find they can manage the work, or provide special units to correct weaknesses - usually mathematics. Small colleges can only do that if they habitually provide individual programmes for students who do not fit readily into the course programmes. And that is difficult to do.

Market Influences on Access Policy

54. But among all the statements of policy for any regulations there were few instances of explicit reference to the accreditation of experiential learning. It was almost as if there was some assumption about it 'counting' when it came to considering unqualified applicants. So at this point the focus can shift from policies to practices.

55. There are no references to practice which indicate a systematic approach to the assessment of experiential learning. Some edge towards it. However, the interplay between policy and practice is always subtle. Practice can evolve gradually and so acquire the standing of policy, even though nothing has been consciously decided, so that everything flows from day-to-day practice in counting applicants, filling places, meeting staff-student

ratio requirements, and keeping the Regional Staff Inspector quiet. Alternatively, policy can determine practice, taking full account of the budget and approval complications which can arise these days.

56. It all depends on how an institution perceives its role in the community. In some areas there are so many well-qualified younger people that all places can be filled many times over, and there is no obvious reason for considering experiential learning. In other areas, despite the numbers of well-qualified young men and women, institutions are constantly trying to provide retraining for those older people who can either see the need to be better qualified or are looking for some way out of unemployment. For them, experiential learning can be a vital matter. In one area a head of department has worked out a full-time programme for older workers with fast routes including awarding credit open to any who can take them, but finds that his LEA now requires all adults to pay steep fees. He has a policy which he cannot put into practice.

Institutional practices

57. Both TEC and BEC courses demonstrate the influence of significant regional differences. There is no doubt that for most institutions the policy towards experiential learning for access to these courses is almost dictated by large application lists of well-qualified youngsters. Practice is dominated by it. Whatever policy may say, practice is likely to be a reflection of the way the member of staff reacts to two factors: the extra effort, and perhaps work, in trying to take experiential learning into account for entry compared with the relatively straightforward admission of applicants holding conventional qualifications; and the comparative strengths of claims of a young man or women trying to find a way into employment and of an older man (usually) who seeks some way out of unemployment or to effect a career change. And regions differ.

58. These examples of accounts given of practice run the full gamut:

By Principal at Executive Level.

'College advertising - prospectus, brochures, etc., encourage applications from mature students who do not necessarily have appropriate 'A' level entry requirements. Thus the various admissions groups are "encouraged" to look at such applications with sympathy. There is not a "policy" in the sense of an agreed target percentage.'

By Academic Board.

'Additionally, there is a college aim to develop community links especially in terms of part-time qualifications. This implies a sympathetic attitude to experiential learning. The academic board's policy is to maintain CNAA standards. The "Qualifications Committees" exercise judgement with regard to alternative entry qualifications and refer back to the board via a "special entry" committee each year which monitors decisions.'

College Practices.

'Experiential learning is considered from:

i) the application (open-ended support statement)
ii) the reference
iii) the interview

The interview is by far the most important in reaching decisions about whether the applicant could successfully complete the course.'

'Criteria:

1. Basic literacy and numeracy (technical qualifications often decide the latter). Judgement by admission tutors likely advantage of "study skills" programme in term one and special tutorial support in numeracy.
2. Special knowledge/experience. Theoretical knowledge of relevant field. Evidence of critical awareness of broader issues and principles (texts).
3. Standing and knowledge of referees. Vis-a-vis clients.'

Institutional practices in university validating colleges

59. In another institution the Academic Board set up a Committee composed of all admission course tutors to consider exceptional admissions on the grounds of maturity, experience, foreign and non-standard qualifications, and so on. The officer who completed the questionnaire wrote as follows of college practices.

> We recognise that a mature applicant - particularly the more mature - does not lightly undertake advanced academic study. If after due consideration such an applicant is prepared to take the risks involved we are predisposed towards letting him (more usually her). However we look for some recent experience of academic work at an appropriate level so that we can be satisfied that the applicant is taking an informed decision. We very often require such an applicant to take one or more of the modules of our Modular degree course as a part-time occasional student. Frequently we accept the evidence of authorship of reports or other work making an intellectual demand of on applicant as evidence of academic potential. We often set tests or ask for an essay on a general topic. Where there are particular requirements for admission to a course such as named 'A' level subjects, dispensation from them is only granted where there is evidence of the applicant having the appropriate base of knowledge. Almost all dispensatory admissions are after searching interview.'

These policies and practices apply to all courses offered in the institution.

Institutional practices in other colleges

60. As with policy, the practice at colleges whose degrees are validated by a university are more circumscribed:

> 'i) The college interviewer would explore the experience of the candidate.
> ii) Reference would also be taken up.
> iii) The course leader would make a decision whether to accept, subject to university approval.
> iv) It is fair to state that experiential learning as such is hardly ever an important factor: the cases which go forward to the university are almost always concerned with unusual paper qualifications, or qualifications which are close to the normal entry requirements.'

There are variants on the procedure but in essentials they go through the same steps. And these comments are typical:

> 'While experiential learning will be taken into account in assessing applications it is unlikely that it will be accepted in lieu of evidence of academic ability.'

and:

> 'Experience will only be accepted as equivalent where it is highly relevant to a particular course. This may be tested by written reports from referees, by a 2,000 word essay and/or by questioning at interview. It cannot be said to play a significant part in assessment of the application in most cases.'

61. Frequently heads of department act on delegated authority from the principal.

> 'As the Director of the Business Studies Division, I tend to exercise the 'discretion' on behalf of the Principal. The level and appropriateness of experiential learning is assessed through an interview, and takes into account students' self-selection. The criteria are:
>
> i) Age: I would not normally recommend a student over the age of 25 for the National or over 35 for the Higher as likely to find these qualifications beneficial.
> ii) Previous work experience: I would usually look for some pattern of stability and business-related work history.
> iii) Previous study experience: some evidence is needed of the applicant's ability to cope at the National or Higher level. Such evidence might embrace their previous academic record; evidence of reading, or recent private studying; and assessment - in which colleagues could join - of the applicant's numerate and literary ability; evidence of serious commitment.
> iv) Suitability of the qualification to their longer-term career intentions.
>
> Whenever a candidate seems likely to be able to cope with, and benefit from a course, and demonstrates serious commitment, I would very much want to help them.'

62. One head of department tried to deal with the larger numbers of older applicants he anticipated receiving by sending a general letter of guidance to career officers in the area. It included:

> 'At the lower end of the possible age range - say 21 to 25 - we are particularly careful to examine the circumstances of applicants leaving full-time education. For example, those who actually took 'A' levels within the last four or five years and failed are less likely to be accepted than someone who had good 'O' levels but was unable to take 'A' levels for reasons of, say, health or domestic circumstances.'

During a visit this intelligible, though somewhat partial (even ill-founded) view was elaborated. It emerged that former members of the armed forces were seen as more suitable students than employees with 20 years' experience in the business world. No doubt that is an instructive instance of regional differences.

63. This describes what happens at Course Tutor and Course Committee Level for TEC:

> 'A Course Panel considers the applications of post-experience students. Particular attention is paid to an applicant's mathematical background and his overall profile. In general, credit for level I units is relatively straightforward but credit for experiential learning at the higher levels is not readily attained. In difficult cases resort would be made to viva-voce and/or written tests.'

That is a measured statement. This is a rather more expansive one:

> 'For part-time day and evening higher certificates and higher diploma programmes it has proved fairly straightforward either to direct students to the local technical college for bridging studies (or incorporate them in our own) or offer the students a proportionate exemption for their prior achievement. We have found TEC to be quite flexible and helpful with this.
>
> We have tended to refuse requests for credits for CGLI units since the grounds in the cases we have encountered did not seem valid. As we are just moving into full-time higher diploma programmes, we have not had any substantial experience in offering 'unusual' credit exemptions for this area although I imagine some will be necessary, based on our HND experience.'

64. But in many cases the description of college practice is so general as to be uninformative:

> 'As per TEC specification. Experiential learning is identified at interview and through references.'

Institutional practices in CCETSW

65. The validation procedures of CCETSW are such that admission to their courses is more or less prescribed, leaving little room for institutional policies to be developed. This quotation under College Institutional Practices for a CQSW course makes the point:

> 'For the CSQW course, the sources of evidence, in practice which we utilise for identifying experiential learning are:
> 1. the student's statement accompanying the application
> 2. the references
> 3. the essay written as part of the selection procedure
> 4. the individual interview
> 5. the panel interview.
>
> Given the course here is for mature students (many with limited academic qualifications and an increasing number of change of career applicants), experiential learning weighs considerably in selection decisions.
>
> The qualities we look for are spelled out in our submission, and as this has been approved by CCETSW, they (together with the means) come within validationary scope.'

The same is true for the CSS:

> 'Selection procedures are laid down by the Scheme's Joint Management Committee and carried out by the Selection Panel of the Scheme. Selection criteria are

therefore not the prerogative of any individual institution but depend upon the candidate and his agency fulfilling the requirements of the Scheme.'

66. The PCSC validated by CCETSW is different. This is typical of the procedure followed when the emphasis for recruitment is on school leavers and it also is a good indication of the care which is taken for recruitment to the PCSC:

'Selection sequence is as follows:-

1. On receipt of the application form the student is required to attend the college and sit the department's entrance test

2. Depending upon the grades achieved the applicants are either
   (a) requested to attend an interview with their parents or
   (b) an alternative course is suggested which may be better suited to their level of ability.

3. On the evening of the interviews a video plus tape slide programme fully illustrating the course practical placements and an explanation of the subject areas is given by the lecturers contributing to the course.

4. All students and parents are interviewed by the course tutor or a lecturer making a major contribution to the course and a representative of the LA Social Services Departments, i.e. the training officer and Heads of Training establishments (residential and day care establishments).

5. Each team of two interviewers are requested to try to ascertain that the potential student is making a realistic and reasoned choice of course .

Experiential learning
The areas of questioning suggested to the interviewing panel would seem to fall into the category of experiential learning as defined in this survey.'

67. Some practices are based on a refusal even to consider mature students for the PCSC on the grounds that older students are not mobile and in any case the course is essentially a route into a first job for youngsters. Elsewhere a different view is taken. If recruitment should 'normally' be restricted to the 16-19 year age range that means that older applicants are eligible. Where a head of department knows the area well, has good relations with the local authority as employer and understands the need for opportunities to be created for 'older' young women, particularly those from ethnic minorities, the policy quite deliberately takes 19+ entry as a route for late developers of all races to begin their professional training. Necessarily 'experiential learning therefore is limited by youth'. But it counts.

Institutional practices in NNEB

68. The NNEB regulations indicate that the course is intended for school leavers as well. This description is typical of the procedure followed: thorough, careful, thoughtful.

'How The Application Procedure Works
There are always many more applicants than places available.

Stage one
Initial Assessment
When your application has been received it is carefully considered in the light of your school record and what you have told us about yourself. You will need to have a good level of English and have worked at a similar level in four or five other subjects at least. Those who do not meet the requirements will be notified their application has been unsuccessful.

Stage Two
Those who meet the initial entry qualifications will proceed to Stage Two which is a Preliminary Day in a Nursery or Infants School. You will receive a letter asking you to go to a certain school for a day where you will spend time working with children. The Head and staff of the school are all involved in the training of Nursery Nurses and will be looking to see how well you relate to children, etc. In the afternoon, a Nursery Nursing Tutor will visit the school to interview you with the Headteacher. They will make a recommendation as to whether or not you should be call for FINAL INTERVIEW.

Those who are not being asked for FINAL INTERVIEW will be informed.

Stage Three
Final Interview
The final interview takes place here at College. You will be invited to meet the Nursery Nursing Course Tutor and the Head of Department to discuss your application further. Your parents may accompany you if you wish, but we shall not need to talk to them until a later stage.

Following your final interview you will receive a letter to say whether or not you have been accepted. This letter usually arrives at the end of May or the beginning of June.

Successful candidates are then invited to bring their parents to a meeting at which details of the requirements of the Course are fully explained. Tutors are available to deal with questions of travel, grants, etc. This meeting usually takes place towards the end of June.

Final acceptance is dependent on a satisfactory medical report. Details of this are sent with provisional acceptance notice.'

69. Most NNEB course tutors report rising qualifications among their applicants so it is not altogether surprising that in one institution:

'Experiential learning is not taken into account instead of academic ability.'

Incidentally, that is an interesting example of confusion about the nature of experiential learning.

70. This is a sharp contrast from another college:

'Experiential learning (attitudes of caring, sharing, integrity, survival) is assessed through school references and an interview by the course tutor, head of department and nursery school head as a panel. It is "got at" by questions and discussions -

after the interview the panel will discuss the applicant's impression amongst themselves thereby introducing some objectivity to the exercise.'

71. As with the PCSC not all heads of departments, however, are prepared to have their admissions policies dictated to them by a national body. Local conditions may make the general rules unhelpful. The point is made in this quotation:

> 'This college swims against the tide by recruiting to the NNEB Course young and mature students who may well have achieved no passes at Ordinary Level. ... Applicants achievements, personal presentation, experiences, references and attitudes towards the care and development of children are carefully considered and evaluation is attempted by the interviewing panel. Much weight is placed on evidence of involvement with child care and the applicants' reactions to the experiences.'

Here, experiential learning clearly counts.

Institutional practices and CGLI

72. Few institutions had much to say about CGLI. This is one of the most informative accounts of practice:

> 'The College practice with regard to C & G Courses is to consider candidates with suitable experiential learning for admission to the suitable year of the course as long as it is compatible with the relevant C & G subject regulations. For instance, the C & G 236 Part I Course normally takes two years attendance on a one day per week part-time day basis and an applicant offering suitable experiential learning would be considered for entry to the second year of this course. However, the regulations state that there is a prerequisite of possessing the Part I Certificate before entry is allowed to Part II of the Course and in those circumstances we would not allow those with experiential learning only to enter direct to Part II.
>
> To establish and assess the level of experiential learning an applicant is:
> (i) always interviewed by the Head of Department and/or the Senior Lecturer in charge of the Course,
> (ii) given a written test where it seems desirable,
> (iii) sometimes asked for educational and/or employer references. For such applicants who desire to enter C & G full-time courses, such references are always asked for.'

73. Others seemed dependent on external authority:

'Non-standard entries are checked with the CGLI officer'

'No experiential learning is employed on CGLI courses'

'The cut-off is when the course is full'

Institutional practices and RSA

74. For RSA things seem relatively straightforward:

> 'Admission to courses leading to RSA qualifications will depend on general educational standard - few are rejected. Entry to specific stages will depend on

the level of competence shown in the course rather than on outside experience.'

As with City and Guilds, most institutions have little to say about procedure for RSA, so this was an exception:

> 'If an applicant does not possess the necessary minimum qualification for entry to the secretarial course we usually ask for a written statement by the applicant as to the reasons why they believe they should be admitted. These details are then fully discussed at interview and relevant references are followed up ... basically candidates are assessed as to their projected ability to cope with the course in question and how much their past experience will assist them, particularly in the light of knowledge already obtained from experience which other applicants with the minimum entry requirement might not in fact have so far acquired.'

Institutional practices and REB

75. Institutions had even less to say about Regional Examining Bodies despite the large number making use of their facilities. The reasons for that have been given in the Review and Appraisal Appendix. This makes the next extract particularly interesting. It shows the composition of an interviewing team which is unique among the returns made to this project:

> 'At interview, knowledge and skills other than formal academic qualifications are always explored, especially by trade union representatives. This is especially important in this industry which has a significant number of adults attending part-time day and block release courses.'

This refers to students from the National Coal Board, selected for a course by committees which include industrial representation ('not just training officers but specialists and union officials') together with the college.

Part-Time students

76. Although it is not always made explicit, most of the responses appear to apply to full-time students. According to what is sometimes said, part-time students often get relatively perfunctory treatment compared with the full-time students. This comment applies to non-degree courses and mainly in colleges of further education:

> 'The course tutor or the duty tutor will make a quick judgement and allocate students to courses, referring problems to the head of department.'

77. Given the very substantial number of part-time students involved in some of the courses under review, this raises very serious questions indeed; some discussion of them features in the next chapters. It also raises questions about interviews. If that last comment is typical, and there is no reason to assume that it is not, almost by definition many part-time students are not interviewed as carefully as full-time students. Given the importance placed on interviews throughout the statements made for assessing experiential learning, it can only mean that colleges take slight note of the experiential learning of many part-time students.

78. Almost invariably any details of college practices cite interviews as a prime means of assessing experiential learning. In some cases there may be two interviews for 'unqualified applicants'. The first may be with the subject specialist to probe a candidate's capability for studying the course as a preliminary to the formal occasion attended by all applicants, or it might be the other way round. Essays are sometimes set to be done either at home on the take-home pattern or under supervision, and these, plus the comments of markers, are often used as material in an interview. So is evidence of formal study. Information from applications and references are brought in. It is quite obvious from details sometimes quoted as part of college practice that interviews are often extremely thorough:

> 'Full-time Courses
> All applicants for places on full-time secretarial courses are interviewed by Departmental Staff on a 4-point scale according to the following criteria:
> 1. Motivation for Admission
> 2. Awareness of Course Content
> 3. Attitude to intensive structure of course weighted towards office skills
> 4. Career ambition
> 5. Powers of oral communication
> 6. General appearance
> 7. Social adjustment
> 8. Attitude to interview
> 9. Organising ability
> 10. Ability to meet terminal standard of course.
>
> Experiential learning would be identified mainly through discussion on points 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 10. In borderline cases supporting documentation from employers or other acceptable sources would be requested.'

Interviewing

79. There is little doubt that often the combination of information gleaned from the application form, what is and what is not said in references, and the general and detailed information which can be obtained through interviews offers fairly comprehensive evidence on which to say 'yes' or 'no' to an applicant for a place on a course, given the present composition of application lists. But this is not the same as assessing experiential learning. According to many replies this assessment can be done confidently by asking the question 'can this person cope with the course?'. So long as the applicants conform roughly to those with whom interviewers have considerable experience, that is fine. But if interviewers find themselves facing applicants whose background and credentials fall outside that experience it might not be such an easy question to answer. In some cases, too, that criterion is supported by another: 'will this candidate benefit from the course?'. But that is an entirely different question, especially when it is linked, as it sometimes is, with the tutor's judgement as to whether following a particular course will bring the career advancement which the applicant seeks.

80. This indicates the confusion which can arise when college staff answer questions about their assessment of experiential learning. There is a general tendency to assume that it is something they do automatically. They may not realise their assumptions can take them leaping ahead to other matters and that they have not made any reliable assessment at all. For example, this somewhat masochistic approach shows how subjective judgement can become:

> 'If someone is making a sacrifice to take a course, this is a good indication of the likelihood of success on the course.'

81. There were very few examples which showed a deliberate approach to the assessment of experiential learning:

> 'Mature students without conventional entrance requirements
> Applicants are all interviewed and in addition write an essay. The object of the essay is to assess their ability to organise their knowledge and experience into a coherent and relevant answer, and does not require "academic" knowledge. In interviewing these candidates I would look for, in their application and at the interview, some indication that they can use their previous experiences as a way of informing themselves of specific issues within the curriculum. If not as knowledge, as an insight, perhaps even a "hypothesis". For example, I would expect someone who has worked in a Supplementary Benefit office to be able to question the problems of providing benefits in this way; I would also expect, say, an ex-offender to say why his experience of the criminal justice system might provide him with advantages over other students. At the same time I would like candidates to see how far their minority status might affect their relationships with others on the course.'

And again:

> 'The assessment (during an interview) is a value judgement on the part of the interviewer, the main test being, is the experience of such a nature and duration to make up for the lack of any more formal qualifications, and will it make a positive contribution to the course being applied for?'

But notice, both rely on an interview.

Limitations and practices as identified

82. Regional differences have been referred to. They are important in another way. In relatively small closely-knit communities college staff and employers often know one another very well and trust each other's judgement. So that it can be for BEC or TEC courses an inquiry by phone or during a personal conversation can produce in effect an assessment of a candidate's experiential learning which is nowhere near as casual as it can sound. It remains partial and inadequate. But it may be more reliable than some formal interviews conducted elsewhere.

83. In concluding this chapter on policies and practices it is also important to record that admission with advanced standing was mentioned only once or twice and then in relation to TEC courses. In view of the possible implications of the assessment of prior learning given in paragraph 15, this is particularly important to register.

84. The final comment in this chapter must be that generally speaking there was little or no clear evidence that institutions recognised the need for agreed and reliable procedures for assessing experiential learning so that it be formally accredited for admission. Whatever policies were enunciated, whatever practices were claimed, even where consideration of experiential learning is taken seriously as part of academic responsibilities, it hardly goes beyond relying on the professional judgement of experienced tutors based on application papers, perhaps an essay or some tests and references, and, as the centrepiece, the interview.

CHAPTER 3
COMMENTARY AND INSTANCES OF GOOD PRACTICE

No instances of good practice discovered

85. This commentary can best begin where 'Policies and Practices' left off. With rare exceptions through all the responses to questionnaires and personal discussions there runs an assumption by most academic staff that the assessment of experiential learning is something they actually do. They do not.

86. Instances of good practice therefore are not examples of assessment procedures which can be commended; they are no more than pointers which may help awarding bodies and institutions alike to develop their policies and practices concerning the recognition and accreditation of experiential learning for admission to courses.

Limitations of Interviewing

87. The assumption that tutors do assess experiential learning is honestly held, firmly believed, but suspect. It is as if at policy level printed exhortations and declarations of intent are the same as action, and that for day-to-day practice there is little more to be done, provided the interviewing of applicants is thorough. Neither begin to approach the assessment of experiential learning. The insistence on the effectiveness of interviews demonstrates this. The belief is that interviews reveal what a candidate has learned. In other words, it all happens in the mind of the tutor. That can never be valid and reliable evidence.

88. The trouble about interviews is that often interviewers do more talking than listening, without being aware of it. Candidates can end up knowing more about the interviewer than the interviewer knows of the candidate. Even in an excellently conducted interview it is unlikely that a tutor will obtain an accurate account of what a candidate knows. Even when confidential references and results of written tests are brought into account at interview, the case remains; alone, interviewing is no adequate way of attempting to assess experiential learning. It is impressively thorough when interviews take half an hour, are double banked with subject specialists holding additional interviews, but even then the interview is no more than one valuable tool for the assessment of experiential learning. It is not an assessment kit complete in itself.

89. This emphasis on interviews and neglect of other approaches to assessment reveals a general lack of awareness of the significance of what adults may learn these days without being taught. Recognition that adults may know more than they think they know implies logically the development of policies based on that hypothesis and procedures designed to

find out what they know. In this inquiry there is none which meets any reasonable criteria. Disturbing, but true; that is the major finding of this report.

The best instances

90. Not surprisingly, therefore, there were very few examples of a systematic approach to the assessment of experiential learning. The nearest is an example already quoted which shows a tutor making full use of an interview:

> 'In interviewing candidates I would look for ... some indication that they can use their previous experience as a way of informing themselves of specific issues within the curriculum. If not as knowledge, as an insight, perhaps even as a hypothesis ... At the same time I would like candidates to see how far their minority status (being older than the general undergraduate on the course - my explanation) might affect their relationships with others on the course.'

91. That does not go far enough. The searching questions implied will undoubtedly reveal something of what an applicant has learned from experience of life and work. But they cannot ensure a candidate reveals as much as he knows. The difficult truth is that while penetrating questions and skillful discussion may go beneath the surface of what a candidate claims to know, their success as an instrument for assessing experiential learning depends on how a candidate hears the questions and the line of discussion, and how the tutor understands what the applicant says. In no sense can the results be taken as sufficient evidence of the knowledge a candidate has acquired.

92. The only way to meet the criteria required for valid and reliable assessment of experiential learning is through procedures designed to enable candidates to reveal what they know, in a form which can be checked, and evaluated independently. That is light years away from relying on interviews. Nor will tests or essays suffice. It implies rigorous reconsideration of existing methods of assessment and systematic development of additional techniques.

93. In trying to understand why so little attention is being paid to the assessment of experiential learning, it is important to set alongside this reliance on interviewing, the plain fact that there is less and less need for institutions to take much account of unqualified or non-traditional students. The numbers of well qualified applicants for most courses simply means that the question does not arise. Not, that is, unless there is some policy which commits the institution to accepting unqualified candidates, in practice.

Institutions' use of existing regulations

94. In these circumstances it is not surprising either that the rules and regulations of

awarding bodies are sometimes used as the excuse for inaction. Certainly it helps to explain why there seems so little use of the facilities offered by some awarding bodies. As Appendix 2 makes clear, both CNAA and TEC, have deliberately set out to encourage institutions to admit unqualified applicants where an institution is satisfied they have the ability and aptitude to follow a course successfully. So far neither awarding body has gone on to suggest ways of assessing experiential learning for access in pursuance of this policy of encouragement. This they could well consider doing because institutions have not taken the initiative to develop these procedures for themselves.

95. Furthermore no awarding body has developed a policy for the accreditation of experiential learning. Tacitly, some permit it at institutional level but that is not the same as a decision on policy taken by a statutory validating body.

Need for Institutional Policies

96. This contrast between the powers given to institutions by awarding bodies and the use made of them highlights the importance of institutions having clearly understood and publicised policies. In turn that raises the question of the role of academic boards. If policies are not decided by academic boards there is no possibility of them being widely understood, let alone applied. Part of the academic leadership responsibilities of an academic board towards its institution is to educate and influence the tutorial staff. The discussions, papers and negotiations which precede a policy decision are all part of this process. But it culminates in a decision itself as it affects the day-to-day working responsibilities of tutors. So where no policy decisions have been taken at institutional level about the assessment of experiential learning and this is the case in every institution which has responded to this project, it is not surprising that there is no significant practice. An instance of good practice giving a clear policy line is the Academic Council minute referred to in paragraph 39. It stops short of assessments but it is clarity itself.

97. Clear policies give academic staff a sense of security and of institutional support when they try to develop practices. Without that security and support there is only a small number of people with the drive and strength to do things on their own. For example, it was a very strong head of department who felt able to make special arrangements with a major employer in the area to tailor TEC courses to meet the professional requirements of the employer, whereby unqualified employees could attain a professional status. Part of the arrangement was to use the employer's facilities and staff for teaching 'courses' as part of the overall programme. Some college colleagues did not like this; they thought it was doing them out of a job. But for the employees it meant that their experiential learning was brought into account so that in effect they were on an accelerated course. How much easier all that would have been if it was clear institutional policy. It stands as an instance of good

practice based on individual initiative. It also stands as an example of what can be done when regulations are used so that courses are made to meet the needs of particular groups of people.

98. There is another reason why institutional policies concerning the assessment of experiential learning, or lack of them, are of great importance now. There are marked regional differences in the social, economic and employment conditions in which institutions are working. With present levels of unemployment those differences are becoming more evident. So different institutions may wish to respond to unqualified applicants for courses differently in different parts of the country. If there is no institutional policy defining its responses to unqualified applicants their fate is in the hands of heads of departments, course tutors or admissions tutors making decisions as best they can, in the light of their view of what the institution ought to be doing.

99. This can produce bizarre results. In the same institution there was one course tutor quite deliberately using a course designed for school leavers to serve older students as an attempt to meet some of the needs of the surrounding community and interpreting the regulations for that purpose, while another tutor believed (incorrectly, it seemed) that the course regulations excluded the unqualified applicants he wanted to admit. Had there been an institutional policy decision taken by an academic board everyone would have known where they stood. It might have resulted in excluding even more unqualified applicants, or admitting more. But tutors would have had a brief for approaching the issue of the accreditation of experiential learning for access to their courses.

100. Any perception of unqualified applicants for courses, and so of experiential learning, will be heavily affected by what is taken to be the stance of the particular awarding body. This is where myth is important. For instance, it is commonly said that CNAA allows no more than 10 per cent unqualified students in any course entry. No such ruling exists. CCETSW is believed to be inflexible about admissions to the PSCS for older students. It is not, though it may be reluctant to do more than turn a blind eye. A head of department welcomed the BEC 19 year old age barrier for distinguishing between exceptional and discretionary entrants on the grounds that it relieved him of the necessity of considering under-19 year olds. What he really feared was that BEC would drop on him heavily if he admitted too many of either category. BEC refutes this.

Institutional perceptions of awarding bodies

101. Misapprehensions such as these make it important to discuss briefly the views of awarding bodies and institutions respectively of rules and regulations which bear on the accreditation of experiential learning for admissions, and so influence institutional practice.

More detail is given in Appendix 2.

102. The awarding bodies fall into three groups. CNAA, TEC and BEC make their awards on the basis of courses and programmes which they have validated following negotiation with institutions in which the guiding principle is the excercising of the fullest possible academic responsibilities by the institution itself. The second group of validating bodies contain the universities and CCETSW and NNEB. The central difference between this and the previous group at first is that less autonomy is allowed to institutions. The third group of awarding bodies comprises the CGLI, RSA and REB which act as examining bodies rather than validating bodies in the sense in which validation applies to the first two groups.

103. Each group exercises a different set of influences on institutions associated with them. Working in the reverse order RSA and REBs do not claim to have any influence on the practices of institutions since they provide merely an examining service. Nor would the institutions have it otherwise. CGLI is different. The Institute itself holds that its academic and subject committees exercise considerable influence on the content of courses taught in institutions because they are the product of consultative groups of teachers. The Institute makes no claim, however, to influencing institutions one way or another in the matter of experiential learning.

104. Some institutions do not quite see the CGLI like that. They hold that the syllabuses produced by the institute and the rules and regulations concerning them are relatively inflexible in that they do not allow for institutions to vary their courses to take account of their local circumstances. To this extent, therefore, the institutions imply that the CGLI discourages the assessment of experiential learning on account of the need to follow their syllabuses tightly.

105. The validating bodies in the second group, the universities, CCETSW and NNEB - negotiate the content of courses with associated institutions, but the rules and regulations for access to those courses are prescribed. In practice, therefore, as we have seen, university validated courses exclude the assessment of experiential learning for access and insitutions have no power to vary the entrance requirements laid down by CCETSW. For the NNEB the question of special access is irrelevant because of the controls exercised by LEAs both as employers and as grant-aiding authorities.

106. Some institutions dislike the inflexibility of universities over admissions but are powerless to do anything about it. It is part of the validation they sought and accepted.

107. In some institutions which offer more than one CCETSW course, say CQSW and CSS or CSS and PCSC, there is a considerable body of opinion which considers that the regulations are unhelpful. Some claim they prevent them transferring students from a lower level course to a higher one or providing an express route through a course for students whose experiential learning makes that academically acceptable. These tutors claim that regulations are stunting the service they need to provide in their area. These matters are being discussed within CCETSW but it is impossible for anyone to give any indication of their conclusions.

108. This difference of view is an interesting example of the way precise regulations adopted in one set of circumstances may become inappropriate when those circumstances change in ways no one anticipated. It raises the central issue of how far institutions ought to be responsible for admissions rather than having them prescribed by external bodies.

109. Institutional responsibility for admissions looms large for many which offer BEC courses. Many resent what is seen as a purely arbitrary distinction between exceptional and discretionary admissions solely on the age bar of 19 for BEC National and 21 for BEC Higher National. They argue that they are hardly likely to admit students who look like potential failures. Their reputation is at stake. As they see it, the implication is that they are not trusted to make responsible judgements over admissions. This certainly discourages serious thought about the assessment of experiential learning.

110. BEC's view is different. These regulations are under regular review as part of the annual consideration of the results of candidates in the two categories and at all levels. It appears, generally speaking, that candidates admitted under the exceptional procedures, those which are under the direct control of BEC, achieve better results than those admitted under the discretionary arrangements, where the decisions are made by colleges. Consequently BEC has no intention at present of changing the age bar rules. Indeed, BEC tends to assume that the exceptional procedure which requires a college to submit individual cases to BEC for decision prompts tutors to think more carefully about the qualities and capacities of applicants than under the discretionary powers. BEC is also aware that some colleges welcome the age bar ruling as protective cover. They can invoke the BEC ruling for rejecting an applicant rather than accepting the responsibility themselves.

111. As we have seen, CNAA and TEC take a consciously developmental view of their regulations and often find themselves in the curious role of leaders of reluctant or absent followers.

Experiential Learning is not an open question

112. This commentary is an elaboration of the finding that this project has not identified, either by questionnaire response or discussion, a single instance of systematic assessment of experiential learning for accreditation towards admission to award-bearing courses in higher and further education. Some reasons are offered. Most of them are complex. One could be simple: that instances do exist but were not discovered within the limited scope of the work. If such practices do indeed exist, information about them would be particularly valuable. But if this finding is valid, it means that the higher and further education system as a whole could be more flexible than it is, within current regulations.

113. However, the use made of experiential learning for access is not an open question. For a start, the competition between well qualified and unqualified for places on courses where regulations authorise both categories of admissions (CNAA, BEC, TEC, principally) means that the unqualified tend to be left out. This is being intensified through DES and LEA rulings which have nailed down numbers of places. Most of the MSC money poured into the further education system is for the 16-19 age range and to date little attention is being paid to the provision for experiential learning. In any case the problem of maintenance grants for adults wanting to study on sub-degree courses or part-time tends to mean that many leave themselves out; they simply cannot afford the fees. Then there are regional differences. Some areas have been relatively depressed for years and it seems there are few adults with enough resilience to think of turning to any kind of study. Other areas, relatively affluent until recently, have institutions which had no need to develop policies for the benefit of experienced but unqualified men and women. The question is relatively shut.

114. At this general level there is a collision between current educational practice and what can only be called the social needs which the education system should be meeting. Changing social conditions are creating a changing composition in the constituency of potential student bodies, at all levels. Obviously that has implications for the curriculum - hence part of the significance of MSC initiatives - but it also raises questions about admissions. If external circumstances change, institutions have to change their ways as well. And so do awarding bodies.

115. So if the accreditation of experiential learning seems a restricted rather than an open question, that is not to say it should be. The final chapter will suggest how it can be opened.

CHAPTER 4
DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Concluding comments

Significance of Experiential Learning

116. Schools, colleges and universities contribute only part of the processes of learning and developments. In addition we all learn from our homes and friends; from television, radio and the press; from private reading and our own efforts at self-education; sometimes from specific courses and training provided by employers; but above all from the experience of doing a job, and for some now, the experience of not finding a job.

117. Learning from work experience becomes increasingly significant when so many men and women are required to master new knowledge and skills as part of their daily employment. It follows that there are men and women of all ages who may well have greater competence and more extensive knowledge than they realise. In respect of 'unqualified' people who may think of applying for places on courses, this poses important issues for them as individuals and for educational institutions which exist to serve them.

118. For individuals it can well mean having the ability to cope with courses of further education, sometimes at first degree level, without knowing it. They may never have considered seriously that those possibilities were open to them. This is particularly significant for those large numbers in our society for whom compulsory education has been a discouraging rather than an encouraging experience. The implications go further, with even greater significance for some men and women (see paragraphs 15 and 16). In theory on this argument, anyone may have learned enough from life and work experience and uncertificated study to have reached the attainment level required for 'satisfactory completion of the course'. As far as the work goes, they would have 'passed' before they began. And this applies, whether the person has or has not the formal education requirements for entry to the course. Not infrequently tutors will quote cases of this kind. Social work staff will refer to particular students, say on a CSS course, saying that they are perfectly capable of coping with a CQSW course, indeed in some ways many need only half of it to meet the professional requirements for practice. Or tutors on some degree courses will comment that particular students are more or less going through the motions of following the course, because they have virtually covered the material previously, but the regulations dictate that they must formally complete the course. No-one seems able to do anything about it.

119. For institutions, it poses the problem of developing ways of making academic assessments of learning acquired from life and work experience and of giving formal recognition to that learning for entry to courses and/or of granting exemption from

appropriate courses, and exceptionally from a whole programme. In doing so, institutions would be exercising part of their customary academic responsibility - undertaking the public certification of the levels of knowledge and skills reached by individuals and, so, accounting for them to the general public.

120. The case for assessment and accreditation for experiential learning for access to award bearing courses in further and higher education and exemption from parts of their courses, even all of them exceptionally, rests on this assertion: that life and work experience and uncertified study can lead to substantial learning whether or not the person concerned has any formal educational qualifications, and in some cases that learning is substantial, academically.

The case for assessment of Experiential Learning

121. It follows that to provide an adequate service for (perhaps increasingly) large sections of the population whose tax money funds the institutions, polytechnics, colleges and universities need to devise ways of taking experiential learning into account. To that end reliable assessment procedures are needed. At present in this country they do not exist.

122. They could. As we have seen there is nothing in the regulations for entry to the award-bearing courses considered in this project to prevent institutions developing these procedures for themselves. Equally, there is nothing barring LEAs, RACs, the DES or the FEU itself from taking the initiative to encourage the development of appropriate procedures. A bottom-upwards movement is just as possible as a top-downwards development. The fundamental reason for there being little or no initiative at present from either bottom or top is that there are no tried and tested procedures to act as guidelines for development in the assessment of experiential learning. So the most realistic way of looking for developments is through trials or pilot schemes with different kinds of students and at different academic levels and with different award bearing courses in mind.

General possibilities for action

123. Without jumping to the silly conclusions that American practices in the assessment of experiential learning could be adopted wholesale in this country, there is now such substantial experience of the assessment of experiential learning in the USA that it is foolish to ignore it. Furthermore, over the last ten years there has also been a substantial research effort put into the development of assessment procedures in the US with the explicit intention of safeguarding academic standards. An outline of some of those procedures is given in Appendices 3 and 4. For further information and examples readers can refer to The Knowledge Revolution.*

---

* The Knowledge Revolution, Norman Evans, Grant McIntyre, 1981.

Examples from the United States

124. To put those comments in context, there are now some 1,000 institutions of higher education in the US, out of the total of some 3,000, which are currently giving academic credit for experiential learning using a comprehensive individualised approach. This is being achieved in several ways. One is to offer 'challenge examinations' on the external pattern. Anyone can sit the examination whether they have been taught the syllabus or not, and if they reach the required standard they are given the appropriate credit for it. Another way frequently used is through the College Level Examinations Board.

> 'CLEP works as a national external examination system for adults. Syllabuses are published with recommended reading and indications about the kind of examination which will be set. Timetables are published with lists of examination centres. The names of colleges and universities which recognise CLEP examinations are also available. So adults everywhere have the opportunity, first of trying themselves out for higher education study without any necessary commitment, and then of working at undergraduate studies for interest while knowing that the credit they can win will be accepted if and when they choose to follow their studies in a college or university, provided that it accepts CLEP results.'*

125. Still another way, relying on external facilities, is through the arrangements made by the American Council on Education:

> 'ACE now published guides for colleges which relate the content and level of attainment required in the Armed Forces' courses to those of college level courses, and recommend the credit institutions should consider awarding to applicants who have successfully completed those courses. There are three Guides to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Forces,(1) one for the Army, one for the Navy-Marine Coast Guard and one of the Air Force. ACE now also publishes a National Guide to Credit Recommendations for Noncollegiate Courses(2) which gives similar information and recommendations of courses offered by coporations and other civilian organisations. The New York Regents'(3) Programme of Noncollegiate Sponsored Instruction offers a similar service. Each guide makes clear the basis of its evaluation of a particular course, and emphasises that institutions have the responsibility, which they cannot share, of deciding whether to accept, modify or reject any recommendation made. These developments rested on a clear principle: that it was academically acceptable for educational institutions to give formal recognition for all kinds of learning which men and women have acquired through study elsewhere.'*

126. Taking these three possibilities together, an applicant for higher education can submit petitions for academic credit (remission of course) based on a collection of different items. All of them are to do with the acquisition of knowledge and skills before commencing a programme of study in higher education. All of them fall within the definition for this project of experiential learning.

---

(1) ACE, Washington DC, 1976.
(2) ACE, Washington DC, 1979.
(3) This is the body controlling higher education in the State of New York.
* The Knowledge Revolution.

127. There is another way of assessing experiential learning, known as the Portfolio method. A person is given the opportunity to document whatever learning he or she may claim to have acquired, show how the acquisition of that knowledge can be checked, and offer evidence to prove the knowledge has been acquired. It is this portfolio method which has been subjected to extensive research and development work and which is now a thoroughly acceptable means of assessing knowledge in those 1,000 institutions.

128. This is a route taken by increasing numbers of adults and for a very important reason. The procedures which they follow almost invariably result in the adult student having their confidence strengthened in their ability to undertake further study and their motivation enhanced. Perhaps even more important, they find they can then plan their further study programmes and make better sense of their career intentions with a better understanding of the kind of life they wish to lead. And the evidence is that they value those results of the assessment of their experiential learning far more than the academic credit they receive.

129. Each of these approaches to making an academic judgement about what it is that applicants bring with them at the beginning of a course in higher education carries some suggestions for possibilities in this country for those who wish to develop their own procedures.

Significance for adults of assessment of Experiential Learning

130. One of the interesting aspects of these developments in the United States is that in some cases they have come through the institutions themselves as they have attempted to respond to the needs of students in their own areas, the bottom-to-top pattern. In others it has been top-downwards. Some States' Boards of Education took the initiative themselves. In New York, for example, the New York Regents established Empire State College with the express purpose of providing higher education for adults based on the assessment of experiential learning. And, as interest in the assessment of experiential learning has quickened as an integral part of higher education, more of the top-down bodies - States' Legislatures, Regional Accrediting Bodies and associations such as CAEL - have taken close interest to ensure that academic standards are maintained.

Suggestions for action

Enlarging and widening participation

131. The drift of the argument so far is that in Great Britain the assessment of experiential learning for entry to award-bearing courses is something which does not happen within further and higher education, and that it could be included in present arrangements, with great benefit, if suitable schemes were developed. The system would become more

flexible. It could lead to a widening of opportunities for 'unqualified' men and women to study. It could encourage them to do so by giving them a kind of recognition which so far had been withheld, but which can boost confidence powerfully, strengthen motivation and stiffen determination. It seems appropriate therefore to go on and make some positive suggestions about what could be done, what policies could mean in practice.

National Policies

132. First and foremost, there is a national requirement to acknowledge the significance of experiential learning to help the education service respond to the changing circumstances of individuals in a time of rapid social and economic change.

133. Further and higher education should have positive policies for the accreditation of experiential learning in award-bearing courses. Assessment procedures should be developed so that accreditation is valid, reliable and can be evaluated independently. Much can be done right away. See Appendix 4 for some details.

134. Institutions wanting to develop positive policies for the assessment and accreditation of experiential learning would be well advised to ensure that their Academic Boards/Councils adopt, formally, procedures for admission to courses and remission of course, and, where appropriate, arrangements for transfer between courses for 'unqualified' applicants. They also need to establish procedures for executing those policies, identifying those with responsibility for fulfilling them, and for keeping policies and procedures within institutional review. Equally important is to publicise these possibilities in prospectuses and details of courses available to the public.

What institutions can do

135. Institutions can examine the entry regulations for the award-bearing courses they teach and then determine what kinds of evidence they would require to use assessments of experiential learning for entry and remission of course, where it is appropriate. They could certainly use the 'challenge examination' idea. They could develop profiles. Applicants could be asked to record every class or period of instruction they have had since leaving school. Nowadays this should include any education and training obtained through the Manpower Services Commission's provision.

136. Institutions could also develop the 'portfolio assessment' idea, perhaps related to the example given in Appendix 5. At present there is only one instance of this development. Assisted by a small grant from the Wates Foundation and with guidance from the Policy Studies Institute, Goldsmiths College in the University of London and Thames Polytechnic are developing a class for adults called Making Experience Count which is being monitored and evaluated.

Consortia

137. Alternatively these ideas could be worked out through an area consortium. The Open College of the North West, the Open College of the South Bank, and the Manchester Open College Federation are groups of institutions collaborating to try and improve their services. In each case they are considering how to introduce the assessment of experiential learning as part of their provision. And in the latter two cases they consider their scheme will be deficient without it. An example from the United States of a comprehensive regional collaboration is given in Appendix 5.

Academic brokerage services

138. Institutions can also develop assessment centres which could be associated with Adult Education Advice and Counselling Centres to provide a brokerage service for potential students (See Appendix 5 for pointers.)

What Validating Bodies can do

139. One of the reasons why institutions and individual tutors tend to ignore experiential learning for access to courses is the large number of well qualified applicants looking for places. This is a complex matter. It could become a tendentious matter, so it needs discussing. For example, would it be appropriate for an institution which wanted to take experiential learning seriously for admissions to include a directive concerning 'unqualified entrants' in its brief to admission tutors? Would it be proper to go further and reserve places for 'unqualified' applicants whose admission depends on assessments of experiential learning. This would be a form of positive discrimination. Should institutions take such a stance?

140. Validating bodies could be helpful in scrutinising and if necessary rephrasing regulations. For example, frequently regulations refer to 'relevant experience'. That could be expanded to indicate the need to assess the significance of what has been learned from relevant experience, rather than considering the experience itself. They could also draw attention to clauses in their regulations which enable institutions to accredit experiential learning for entry and/or remission of courses. Explicitly they could encourage institutions to use their discretionary powers for the benefit of all who can follow courses satisfactorily, particularly for remission of course. Some rephrasing might help.

141. It would be particularly helpful if awarding bodies could, through liaison committees, wherever possible establish and promulgate arrangements for experiential learning to facilitate movement between courses offered by differing bodies, for entry and for remission of course. This could put a set of step-ladders in position so that students could move up and across, without loss of time.

142. Perhaps the most critical issue for validating bodies is the development of policies for the accreditation of experiential learning. This means going beyond entry regulations which give discretionary powers to institutions to use the assessment of prior learning for admission and remission of course and introducing an additional guiding principle. It is only the validating bodies themselves with their national responsibiliy, which can make authoritative statements and inject the assessment of experiential learning into the bloodstream of higher and further education.

Need for Pilot Schemes

143. Beyond this, there is a pressing need for pilot projects at different levels for different courses in using assessment of experiential learning for entry and remission of course. Singly or collectively, institutions, validating and awarding bodies and LEAs could take initiatives to promote pilot schemes to develop reliable and valid procedures for the assessment of experiential learning with a view to accumulating evidence and producing guidelines for others. The Further Education Unit itself could take the initiative in these matters by encouraging institutions and validating bodies and perhaps commissioning projects.

Initiatives to be taken

144. There is plenty which can be done, now. Initiatives are there to be taken. No-one needs wait upon anyone else before taking them. It is all a matter of the will to act. Action depends on an acceptance that the assessment of experiential learning should be included as a normal part of education provision. That is how a Map of Experiential Learning will appear and so extend Curriculum Opportunity.

APPENDIX 1: Glossary of Terms

The Business Education Council (BEC)*

The Business Education Council (BEC) was set up by the Secretary of State for Education and Science in May 1974. The Council's job is to provide national recognised awards (other than degrees) for those who work or would like to work in any one of a wide range of careers in commerce, finance, distribution or the public sector.

The City and Guilds of London Institute (CGLI)

CGLI is an independent educational organisation founded in 1878 and incorporated by Royal Charter. The Institute offers examinations on its published regulations and syllabuses, and awards certificates mainly at operative, craft and technician level over a wide range of practical subjects.

Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA)

CNAA was established by Royal Charter in 1964 and was given powers to award degrees and other academic distinctions to students who satisfactorily complete courses which it has approved. The courses are designed, taught and examined in institutions of higher education which do not themselves possess power to award degrees. The CNAA ensures that the standards of awards is comparable with university awards by means of a rigorous external assessment of courses and by its approval of examiners nominated by the colleges.

Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW)

CCETSW is an independent body with statutory authority throughout the United Kingdom to promote education and training for social work and for certain other kinds of work in the personal social services. The Council was set up by the Health Visiting and Social Work (training) Act of 1962 as amended by the local authorities Social Services Act 1970 and by various statutory instruments. CCETSW itself was established in 1971.

Experiential Learning

For this project, experiential learning means the knowledge and skills acquired through life and work experience and study which are not formally attested through any educational or professional certification.

Regional Examining Bodies (REB)

An REB is an organisation established on a regional basis by the constituent authorities and institutions for the purpose of providing examinations and assessment in the craft and operative field in that region. They have reached agreement with City and Guilds over common examinations and standards. There are six:

East Midlands Further Education Council
Northern Council for Further Education
North Western Regional Advisory Council for Further Education
Welsh Joint Education Committee
West Midlands Advisory Council for Further Education
Yorkshire and Humberside Council for Further Education.

Royal Society of Arts (RSA)

The RSA was the originator of commercial and technological examinations in this country and still holds a foremost position in connection with the former. The Board's examinations cover the whole range of business and commercial studies at all levels from pre-vocational to post-graduate. The Board's schemes are developed in response to the expressed needs of teachers, employers and representatives of professional organisations who make up the Board's advisory and moderating committees. The examinations started in 1856 and are administered by the Royal Society of Arts Examination Board.

Technician Education Council (TEC)*

The Technician Education Council was set up by the Government in 1973 and given the role of developing and operating a unified system of technician education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In 1977, it also assumed responsibility for courses in Art and Design below degree level.

By the mid-1970s TEC awards will have replaced the technician certificates of the City and Guilds of London Institute (CGLI) and the Ordinary National Certificates (ONCs), Ordinary National Diploma (ONDs), Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs), awarded by over twenty joint committees. The CGLI will continue to offer courses for awards at craft level. TEC covers an extremely wide range of subjects and industries.

* From October 1983, BEC and TEC will be replaced by B/TEC (Business and Technician Education Council).

APPENDIX 2

REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF REGULATIONS

This Appendix covers regulations ranging from admission to degree studies to those for admission to examinations offered by Regional Examining Bodies to young people who may be in school or further education college and may be without any formal educational qualifications. Necessarily, the 'ways in which experiential learning is recognised for admission' vary greatly between the eight award-bearing courses included in this project: first degree studies, Technician Education Council, Business Education Council, Central Council for the Education and Training of Social Workers, City and Guilds Institute of London, National Nursery Education Board, Royal Society of Arts, and eight Regional Examining Boards, associated with the Regional Advisory Councils. Each award-bearing course is intended to serve a particular purpose leading to general education, craft, technician, business or professional qualifications as the case may be. The relationship, therefore, between experiential learning - the uncertificated knowledge and skills a person brings with them - and entry will tend to differ in the various courses. The regulations quoted in the following eight sections make this clear. The appraisal for each section offers a commentary on what the regulations appear to mean for individuals who might wish to enter for that particular course or examination.

Universities

Regulation for entry

Each of the 37 universities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have some provision within their entry regulations for the admission of 'candidates without the conventional GCE qualifications'. Appendix IV to the Compendium of University Entrance Regulations gives a summary.

University	Minimum Age to be attained	Each application considered individually on its merits	Other policy or supplementary procedure
ASTON	23 (by 1 October of year of entry)	X	Applications considered individually; special admissions procedures in lieu of the general entrance requirement based on individual candidate's background and qualifications
BATH		X	Candidates considered only for courses in the Social Sciences and must produce evidence of their academic suitability

University	Minimum Age to be attained	Each application considered individually on its merits	Other policy or supplementary procedure
BELFAST			
BIRMINGHAM	21		See JM3 note overleaf
BRADFORD	23 (on entry)		Candidates must 'submit satisfactory evidence of previous study and of the capacity and attainment requisite to enable them to pursue the course for which they are applying'
BRISTOL	23 (on application)	X	Exceptionally candidates may be declared eligible for admission after submitting 'such evidence of previous education and attainment as is deemed sufficient'
BRUNEL	25	X	Considered only for courses offered by the School of Social Sciences
CAMBRIDGE		X	Adult students recommended by a college as fit to undertake a course for an Honours Degree may be exempted from all or part of the examination requirements for matriculation
CITY		X	
DURHAM			All older candidates carefully considered and full account taken of professional and non-GCE qualifications. Frequently such candidates are considered initially for a General Degree (see Tables 102 and 103) particularly if an Honours Course has a very specific GCE requirement
EAST ANGLIA	17		Candidates may be admitted on the basis of 'satisfactory evidence of the capacity and attainments requisite to enable them to pursue the course proposed'. It is the University's policy to encourage and welcome applications from mature candidates

University	Minimum Age to be attained	Each application considered individually on its merits	Other policy or supplementary procedure
ESSEX			The University is pleased to receive applications from mature students even where they are not in a position to satisfy normal academic requirements. Evidence of serious study of an academic kind - not necessarily continuous - since leaving school is normally looked for. Also certain full practising professional qualifications accepted for special matriculation. Candidates are usually invited for interviews For the Schools of Comparative Studies, Law and Social Studies, applicants may be asked to take an entrance test
EXETER	23		Applications considered from those whose qualifications are deemed sufficient
HULL	21	X	Applications considered on the basis of such evidence as may be deemed sufficient of 'previous serious study and of the capacity and attainments requisite to enable them to pursue the course proposed' Applications also considered from those with professional qualifications
KEELE	19 (by 1 October of year of entry)		Applications considered from those with at least 3 years' employment experience, during which time they must have attended 'systematic courses of study'
KENT		X	Short-listed candidates are required to attend for interview and may also be required to produce written work
LANCASTER	23 (on entry)	X	Applications from mature students and those with relevant (e.g. professional) qualifications are welcomed. Mature candidates who cannot satisfy the general entrance requirement are normally expected to have recently and successfully undertaken a course of formal study at an appropriate level, by way of preparation
LEEDS	21		See JMB note overleaf

University	Minimum Age to be attained	Each application considered individually on its merits	Other policy or supplementary procedure
LEICESTER	23 (on entry)	X	'Evidence of sustained serious study of an academic kind - not necessarily continuous - since leaving school' is normally looked for. Also, certain full practising professional qualifications accepted for special matriculation
LIVERPOOL	21		See JMB note overleaf
LONDON	25 (normally)	X	Applications from mature students are welcomed and a Special Entrance Board of the University is empowered to consider on their individual merits applications, sponsored by a constituent college on behalf of such students who do not satisfy the normal admission requirements. Professional experience and maturity will not be the sole criteria for consideration and the Board will normally look for appropriate evidence of mature age study Note Birkbeck College specialises in providing degree courses for mature students who are engaged in earning their livelihood (see Section VII)
LOUGHBOROUGH	21 (on entry)	X	
MANCHESTER	21	X	See JMB note overleaf
UMIST	21		See JMB note overleaf
NEWCASTLE		X	
NOTTINGHAM	21	X	If a department wishes to make an offer candidates will either be considered for a grant of special matriculation on the basis of their existing qualifications or will be given permission to take the Special Entrance Examination. In either case a candidate admitted under these provisions will be deemed to have satisfied both the general and course requirements

University	Minimum Age to be attained	Each application considered individually on its merits	Other policy or supplementary procedure
OXFORD	25	X	No special regulations for Mature Students (ie men and women over the age of 25 who have not hitherto attended a university). Colleges are sometimes willing to accept applications; candidates may be required to submit specimens of their work or to take test papers
READING	21	X	Applications regularly considered from those who do not satisfy the normal general entrance requirements. Mature candidates for entry are encouraged to submit direct to the University a supplementary application detailing career and study experience when making their formal application through UCCA Note this special consideration does not normally extend to the course requirements which must normally be satisfied In the Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences those selected for further consideration will be invited to take part in a Special Entrance Test and interview
SALFORD		X	Candidates unable to satisfy the general entry requirement in the normal way who will be 23 years of age or over by the date on which they wish to commence their programme of study, and who satisfy the department concerned as to their ability and capacity to pursue successfully the programme of study for which they have applied, may on the recommendation of the Department and on the resolution of the Senate be declared to have qualified for matriculation
SHEFFIELD	21		See JMB note overleaf
SOUTH-AMPTON			
SURREY	23 (on entry)	X	Candidates are required to show they will be able 'to pursue successfully the course for which they are applying'

University	Minimum Age to be attained	Each application considered individually on its merits	Other policy or supplementary procedure
SUSSEX	18		In considering applications from candidates - who must be resident in Britain - the University is looking for those whom it considers of similar calibre to students admitted on the basis of 'A' levels. Applicants are short-listed on the basis of (a) supplementary application forms sent to them after their UCCA application is received and (b) an essay written on a topic specified by the University. Short-listed candidates are required to attend for interview and to sit a university examination. Applicants for a place at Sussex must submit their UCCA applications not later than 15 December and can expect to know the final results of their application to Sussex only in early May
ULSTER	23		
WALES	23 (by 1 October of year of entry)	X	Candidates may be admitted on the special recommendation of a Constituent Institution (which may require applicants to take certain written examinations or to attend an interview)
WARWICK	21 (on entry)		Applications are encouraged from those who have been unable for one reason or another to complete a normal secondary education and who can submit 'satisfactory evidence of previous study and of the capacity necessary to pursue the course proposed'
YORK	21 (on application)	X	

Joint Matriculation Board

1. An applicant for admission to a degree course in one of the universities constituting the Joint Matriculation Board (Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester (including UMIST) and Sheffield) who for special reasons, satisfactory to the Board, is unable to complete entrance requirements in one of the normal ways may seek permission to be admitted under a special procedure approved for candidates of mature years.

2. To be eligible for consideration the applicant must not be less than 21 years of age on 1 May of the year in which he desires to begin his university course.

Candidates who satisfy this condition may be admitted to the examination for candidates of mature years, but admission is granted only after consideration of the individual circumstances of each case. The examination does not follow a set pattern and has no set requirements or syllabuses; it can therefore be adapated to meet the needs and backgrounds of individual candidates. Detailed advice and information may be obtained on application to the Secretary, Joint Matriculation Board, Manchester M14 6EU.

The Open University has different regulations. Its regulations for admission are as follows:

> Every resident of the United Kingdom aged 21 or over is eligible to study with the Open University. That is why it is called 'Open' - it is genuinely open to everyone. You need no prior qualifications: no O levels or A levels, no exam passes or certificates. Admission is basically on a 'first come, first served' principle, so the earlier you apply the better your chances. (The Open University Guide for Applicants to 1983 BA Degree courses, p.7.)

Numbers at entry 1980/1

It was beyond the resources of this project to approach each of the 37 universities for numbers of 'unqualified' applicants admitted for the academic year 1980/1. This would have been the only way of obtaining that information because the categories used by universities when submitting their figures to the Universities Statistical Record do not include 'unqualified'. They lie buried somewhere in 'Other UK qualifications', and perhaps more obscurely, among the 'unidentified qualifications'.

The USR's figures are as follows:

	Under 21	21-25	26-39	40+	Total
Other UK qualifications	6	19	69	19	113
Unidentified qualifications	29	6	7	-	42

At the very most, therefore, assuming that every candidate in each of those categories was unqualified, which of course was not the case, there would have been 155 'unqualified' men and women entering universities out of a total entry of 7,755.

The Open University keeps its own records and its figures are as follows:

Finally registered 1981 new students (U/G)

Total = 100 per cent	14478 per cent
No formal qualifications	8.1
RSA/CSE	2.5
'O' levels	21.4

Appraisal

The devolved nature of admission procedures within universities made it impractical to attempt to give a comprehensive account of them. The list quoted above shows the wide variety of policies adopted by different universities over the admission of 'unqualified' candidates, but a few generalisations can be made. On the one hand universities have always admitted applicants without the generally required formal educational qualifications. They admit whom they please. And sometimes admission is on the basis of experiential learning. On the other hand they tend to be careful and cautious as shown in the policies listed. This is borne out by the responses to the project from some of the 25 colleges and institutes of higher education (but excluding those offering teacher training only) whose degrees are validated by 13 of the universities.

The relationships between those universities and their associated colleges need particular comment. In no sense do the colleges and institutes have authority to admit unqualified students to degree courses. Their powers are limited to making recommendations to their university. Decisions are taken by appropriate committees of the university, which usually include college representatives.

It has to be said therefore that the assessment of experiential learning is not to date a significant issue for universities.

A different comment needs to be made about the Open University. 'Open' and the 'first come first served' principles for its admission procedures say nothing about recognising experiential learning as a basis for entry. Nor is anything done about the accreditation of experiential learning. This is what the Guide to Applicants says about rejections:

> **Applying again**
> If, in the end, we still cannot offer you a place, it will not be because we consider you in any way unprepared or unsuitable, but simply because in most years we have only enough resources to accept some 45 per cent of those who apply. For this reason we ask applicants to recognise that they may have to wait two years for entry. (Page 26)

Council for National Academic Awards

Regulations for entry

The relevant clauses in the admission requirements for the Council for National Academic Awards as set out in the Principles and Regulations for the Award of the Council's First Degrees and Diploma of Higher Education, 1979, are as follows:

8.11-12 Admission of students who do not meet the normal minimum entry requirements.

8.11 An institution may admit a student to the beginning of a course who either lacks the normal course entry qualifications or their equivalents, or who does not meet the course age requirement, provided that the student can present evidence which, in the opinion of the institution, indicates that such admission satisfies the Council's Principles for the admission of a student.

8.11-1 An institution may admit a mature student under 8.11, aged twenty-one years or over by 31st December in the year of entry, to the beginning of a course, not specifically designed for such a student, even when he or she does not possess the normal course entry requirements, provided that the institution is first satisfied that the student has the necessary motivation, potential and knowledge to follow the course successfully.

8.11-2 The admission of a student under 8.11 shall be at the discretion of the institution where the normal minimum course entry requirements are those of 8.13 or their equivalents.

8.11-4 An admitting institution must ensure that the proportion of admissions to a course under 8.11 is not so large as to affect significantly the nature and presentation of the course.

8.12 The Council may approve course regulations such that a specified level of maturity and experience is recognised as a normal qualification for entry to the beginning of the course. Before approving such a proposal, the Council must be satisfied that:

(a) The design of the course will enable students to attain a final level appropriate for the proposed award; and

(b) The proposed procedure for the selection of students is adequate for this purpose.

Numbers at entry, 1980/1

Course	Mature Students(a)	per cent	Course Total	per cent
First degree				
Arts & Social Studies	1,332		12,837	
Business & Management Studies	97		4,499	
Science & Technology	122		16,008	
Art & Design	83		1,127	
Education	259		4,138	
Interdisciplinary	80		1,170	
Total	1,973	4.5	44,344	100
Other courses				
Dip HE Students	589		1,100	
Certificate Course Students	52		1,241	
Total	641		2,341	
Grand totals	2,614	5.6	46,685	100

Note: (a) 'Mature students', i.e. the nearest equivalent to 'Unqualified Entry' in CNAA records

Appraisal

Those clauses (8.11-12) establish that institutions have extensive powers for the accreditation of experiential learning for entry to first degree and Dip.HE. courses. A recent CNAA statement on the 'Extension of Access to Higher Education' (CNAA 1980) can be taken as a commentary on the Council's position. Having mentioned the normal minimum entry requirements the paper goes on, 'the key point is that all applicants should be judged on their individual merits in the light of their total educational background and experience in relation to the demands of the particular course for which they have applied' (para.2). And to meet the obvious reservation which such a policy can arouse, 'experience has shown that applicants with non-standard qualifications are capable of achieving success on first degree and Dip.HE courses without jeopardising the final standard of the awards in question' (para.3).

The central message of the paper however is this: '(i) the responsibility for the admission of individual students rests firmly with the institution conducting the courses and (ii) considerable discretion is allowed to institutions for a student not in possession of the normal minimum entry qualifications' (para.4). The paper refers specifically to mature students (over 21). All the previous points apply, but they are sharpened by 'provided that they are first satisfied that the students have the necessary motivation potential and knowledge to follow the course successfully', institutions have discretion to admit mature students without any formal qualifications (para.8). As if to emphasise that institutions can

use these entry facilities with confidence, 'the Council certainly is not wishing to encourage any lowering of entry standards' (para.9). Which is simply another way of saying that successful academic achievement does not depend on everyone passing formal education examination results.

It also draws out the significance of the regulations concerning the numbers of non-standard entry students and their possible influence on the course. There is nothing to prevent institutions from submitting specially designed courses for validation.

To show that the access net can be cast even wider if institutions are of a mind to do so, the paper draws attention to the way in which practical skills can be taken into account for entry to courses. Having said that a high level of practical skills is also necessary in performance subjects and that most courses in those subjects contain such an entry requirement, the paper says, 'It is a matter for course planners, with the approval of the Council, whether such a requirement should be made in addition to the normal minimum general entry requirements, OR WHETHER IT MAY STAND IN LIEU OF ALL OR PART OF THE MINIMUM GENERAL REQUIREMENTS, (my caps) bearing in mind the need to ensure that any student starting a degree or DipHE course has a broad general education foundation on which the course can build' (para.14).

A few words in the concluding section to the paper makes the Council's concern and the principle informing it uncompromisingly clear. 'In essence the Council believes that where students can demonstrate in some way that they have the necessary ability to embark on a course of higher education, they should be given the opportunity to do so' (para.13). That is an academic exposition of the famous Robbins principle, that all who wish to and have the ability to do so, should be given the opportunity of studying for a first degree.

This CNAA paper does not deal specifically with advanced standing: remission of part of the course and so shortening the period of study. Under the heading Partial Exemption from the taught course element in a course, the Council's Regulations make clear that institutions may admit students to the second year of a course or exempt them from part of a course on the grounds of maturity or previous relevant experience (Regulation 8.26).

The position is clear therefore for all institutions teaching courses validated by CNAA who wish their admission procedures to include the accreditation of experiential learning. The Council's regulations enable them to do so. The Council's policy is to encourage them to do so. It is taking seriously the accreditation of experiential learning in higher education. The figures quoted for Numbers at Entry 1980/1 suggest that either some

institutions are not taking it seriously, or there are only a very small number of applicants who take it seriously as a possibility for them. Either way it is a serious comment on the facilities available.

Business Education Council

Regulations for entry

The relevant clauses in admission requirements are given in the BEC Course Specifications and summarised as follows in 'A Brief Guide to BEC Courses':

BEC General Awards

Students do not need any academic qualifications but must be at least 16 years of age and have completed an English secondary education or its equivalent. They must also show that their use of English is adequate for satisfactory progress on the course.

BEC National Awards

Students should be at least 16 years of age and have a BEC general award with credits or a total of at least four GCE 'O' level passes at Grades A, B or C, or CSE Grade 1 passes or equivalent qualifications. Students of 19 or over may be admitted without the formal entry qualifications, at the discretion of the Principal of the enrolling college.

BEC Higher National Awards

Students should be at least 18 with a BEC National Award or at least one 'A' level plus three 'O' levels at Grades A, B or C or CSE Grade 1. Those entering with 'A' or 'O' levels need to take a conversion course to prepare them for higher national work. Students of 21 and over may be admitted without the minimum formal entry qualifications at the discretion of the Principal of the enrolling college.

Numbers at entry 1980/81

Courses	Total	Applications to Exceptional Admissions	Number of Applications to Exceptional Admissions Granted	Discretionary Admissions		
General	16,000	-	-	-		
National	25,500	1300	825	3.2%	2762	11%
Higher National	9,667		275	2.8%	1716	18%

Appraisal

The regulations show that there is no need of exceptional entry procedures for BEC General Awards. At that level, experiential learning is not an issue for BEC.

For BEC National and Higher National Awards there are two 'exceptional entry' procedures for students. Institutions have the power to take into account experiential learning for the admission under each procedure, but there is a distinct difference in the way those powers can be used under each procedure.

The procedure applying to applicants under 19 (for BEC National) and under 21 (for BEC Higher National) is that submissions are made by the college to BEC central officers requesting that alternative qualifications or some form of experiential learning should stand as an alternative to a formal qualification for entry. Not all applications are accepted, as the figures show above. So for those under-aged candidates, the college is limited to making recommendations that experiential learning should count for entry. It has no power to decide. BEC alone makes those decisions.

The procedure applying to applicants over 19 (for BEC National) and over 21 (for BEC Higher National) is different. Students over these ages may be admitted without the formal entry qualifications AT THE DISCRETION OF THE PRINCIPAL (my capitals) of the enrolling institution. So here the college has the power to make up its own mind about the appropriateness of experiential learning as an entry qualification. It merely reports these admissions to BEC on its registration return.

Hence there are the two categories shown in the figures: exceptional entries (BEC decisions) and discretionary entries (college decisions).

These figures for exceptional entries in the table should be read with reservations. They are not reliable for a number of reasons. The most obvious is that some colleges make mistakes when completing the forms showing the various categories of students entered. For example, some colleges include on their registration returns some candidates who are not listed as having the required qualifications and have not been admitted under exceptional entry procedures. These omissions show up on a computer printout which is scrutinised by the Admissions Officer. In 1980/1 letters went out to some 200 of the 350 centres asking for clarification and explanations. In most cases this was due to clerical error or misunderstandings because a student would have qualified under exceptional admissions procedures but no application was made. This checking procedure is not completed until February or March, following the September when the students began the course. Because normally it is then regarded as too late to deny formal entry to a course to

someone who has been following it for six or seven months, some candidates who have been improperly entered are treated as if they had been properly entered. Strictly their status should be changed to the exceptional entry category. It may well be therefore that according to the entry regulations there are more exceptional entries than the figures show.

All this means that with some 14 per cent of the National entries and some 20 per cent of the Higher National Entries coming from exceptional and discretionary admissions, the accreditation of experiential learning is a relatively significant issue for BEC and its associated institutions, notwithstanding the fact that exceptional entries are at the behest of the Council itself.

Since BEC keeps such a tight control on exceptional admissions two further comments are important. BEC does not publish a list of acceptable alternative qualifications 'to guide colleges in exceptional admissions cases'. It did not want the bureaucracy required to deal with such an enterprise. It wanted to put responsibility firmly on colleges making their own judgements. The other point is, like other national awarding bodies, BEC is acutely concerned that its standard should meet professional expectations. That means not only seeking to ensure that employers are confident in reliable common standards of achievement required across BEC courses but in the entry requirements and procedures themselves. So BEC's careful control of exceptional admissions has to be seen in context of the professions with which it works.

Technician Education Council

Regulations for entry

The relevant clauses in admission requirements for the Technician Education Council are given below. This extract is taken from the Policy Statement, June 1974, of the Technician Education Council in its section Admission Requirements:

> It is expected that most students admitted to TEC programmes will have the qualifications recommended by the Programme Committee, or in a college submission, as proposed by the College and approved by the Programme Committee. However, colleges may, at their discretion, admit students who do not have the recommended entry qualifications but who satisfy the college authorities that they have reached an equivalent standard of attainment in the required subjects. Colleges will be expected to exercise particular care in the selection of these students and may be asked to provide information about such admissions and the students' subsequent performance. Programme Committees may recommend, or colleges propose, special arrangements for the admission of older students, which take account of their particular needs.

A Guide to TEC, November 1980, contains these sections:

6. Admission to Programmes.

6.1 Under TEC's policy of credit exemption, students can be admitted to programmes at different ages and with different levels of attainment. As there are usually

several different combinations of units leading to the same award, students with different abilities and goals can be catered for. (See Section 7).

TEC specifies the normal minimum entry requirements for each programme, examples of which are given below.

Certificate	The minimum requirement is often Grade III passes in CSE Mathematics, a Science subject and English or a subject requiring English as a means of communication.
Diploma	Ranges from CSE Grade III passes in three relevant subjects to three GCE 'O' level passes at Grade C, according to the needs of the students and the industry catered for in the programme.
Higher Certificate	The appropriate TEC Certificate or Diploma or equivalent qualifications, or suitable GCE 'A' level attainment.
Higher Diploma	The appropriate TEC Certificate or Diploma or equivalent qualifications, or a pass in at least one appropriate GCE 'A' level subject.

6.2 Special bridging studies may be needed for students admitted to higher award programmes direct from 'A' level courses. They may also be needed for students who transfer from a craft or advanced craft course

6.3 Although the entry qualifications of the students may vary, the final TEC awards gained will have a common standard.

7. Exemptions

Students can obtain credit for relevant previous study or experience at the discretion of individual colleges. In this way, students can often be exempted from certain units and complete their programme in a shorter time.

For example, if a student has appropriate GCE 'O' level or CSE Grade I passes, he/she can qualify for the TEC certificate in two years of day-release study instead of three years. Many programmes are designed in such a way as to make this possible.

Numbers at entry, 1980/81

Course	Totals	Full-time	Part-time
Certificate	44,871	3,995	40,976
Diploma	15,025	12,112	2,913
Higher Certificate	22,443	502	21,941
Higher Diploma	2,677	1,527	1,150

Appraisal

The Policy Statement of June 1974 included an unequivocal statement: 'However colleges may at their discretion, admit students who do not have the recommended entry qualifications but satisfy the college authorities that they have reached an equivalent standard of attainment in the required subjects'. And further, 'Programme Committees may recommend, or colleges propose, special arrangements for the admission of older students which take account of their particular needs'. Nothing limits colleges from applying these principles for admission to any courses provided by TEC: the Certificate, the Diploma and Higher Diploma or Certificate. It all rests on a basic TEC requirement: that students, whether they have the normal or exceptional entry qualifications, should be likely to be able to complete the course successfully.

The section on Exemptions explicitly extends to discretionary powers of the college, by empowering them to grant credit for previously acquired knowledge, so that 'in this way, students can often be exempted from certain units and complete their programmes in a shorter time'. There is one vital recommendation from the Council to colleges to note, however: 'special bridging studies may be needed for students admitted to higher award programmes direct from 'A' level course. They may also be needed for students who transfer from a craft or advanced craft course'. But even there the phrase 'may be needed' is the key.

The encouragement for colleges to make full use of their discretionary powers is likely to be taken further. The paragraph on Credit for TEC Awards in a new draft Statement of Policy,* reads:

> The Council's policy is that, wherever possible, students should be given credit for relevant previous study and experience. Many TEC guidelines include this provision and colleges are required to state their policy on credit/exemptions in their course

* Due to the merger of the TEC and BEC, action on this new draft policy has been deferred.

proposals. The Council recognises that there are sometimes practical difficulties in operating its policy in colleges either in timetabling or in accommodating individual students whose eligibility for credit may be unusual in some way. While accepting that the policy cannot always be applied, the Council hopes that every effort will be made to give credits to students who qualify for them. Colleges are also encouraged to make full use of their discretion in interpreting the student's previous attainment and experience on an individual basis and devising a suitable course of study for them so that they can complete the course successfully.

Students may not normally be exempted from more than half a course, although special arrangements may be made in special circumstances. Preparatory courses which are designed to exempt groups of students from part of a course normally require the Council's approval.

The discretion offered to colleges to take account of experiential learning is more than sustained in that draft statement: it is being positively extended. The common reference point for all the discretionary powers afforded to colleges is clear. 'Although entry qualifications of the students may vary, the final TEC awards gained will have a common standard.'

TEC does not require returns from Colleges about their students' entry qualifications. There is no central record of unusual admissions. How then does TEC safeguard those standards if it does not require returns from colleges on the credentials of students at admission? There are three answers. The papers to be completed by a college for submission to TEC for validation include under Admissions and Credit in paragraph 4:

4.1 Normal admission requirements for the programme.
4.2 Admission/credit arrangements for crafts and other post-experience course students.
4.3 Please state college procedures for deciding on unusual cases for admission and qualification for credit.

The implication is that TEC expects institutions to have considered systematically admission procedures for 'unusual cases' as part and parcel of their course planning. Nothing is to be left to chance. TEC expects to know before any course is taught for one of its awards exactly how 'unusual cases' for admission are to be handled.

The second answer is that although no reports of what is being, and has been, done are required, as opposed to what it is proposed to do concerning the admission of 'unusual cases', TEC employs ten full-time moderators who act as field advisers and some 500 part-time moderators. These moderators provide an external moderation system which is intended as public evidence of TEC's concern to establish and sustain national standards across all its courses. But it is part of the moderator's function to act as guardian of exceptional admissions. TEC expects institutions to consult moderators over any difficulties or uncertainties they may have over unusual admissions. TEC expects moderators to alert

the Council about any anxiety they may have as to institutional procedures and practices. With official validation proposals defining admission procedures to be used and moderators able to act as the Council's eyes and ears for the working of these procedures, unusual admissions remain at the discretion of the college but within the clear overall responsibility of the Council.

A third answer is in a different category. It is contained in a general observation about admissions to TEC courses. A large majority of the TEC students are part-time day-release students. This means that to get on a TEC course at all these part-time students are recommended, or at least are not blackballed, by industrial employers. So, in a sense, whatever their education qualifications they have 'passed' an industrial test as well. Applied to unusual admissions this means that there is a third check on the quality of applicants.

Thus it is clear that the accreditation of experiential learning either for admission to TEC courses or for academic credit lies within the power of colleges. How far this discretionary power is used TEC cannot say because it does not hold relevant central records. But there is no doubt that TEC is urging colleges to use it. There could be no clearer evidence than its draft statement on credit for TEC awards.

TEC/MSC pilot schemes

From January 1982, in conjunction with MSC's Special Programmes Division, TEC is piloting a number of one year full-time schemes for young people between 16 and 18 who are of technician potential and have the ability to undertake the course successfully.

The TEC/MSC document laying out the scheme says 'the young people may not necessarily have academic qualifications but should be of the educational standards in mathematics, a science and English required for entry to TEC programmes (typically CSE Grade IIIs in these subjects). It is too early to say whether that means in practice applicants will be accepted without the formal qualification of CSE Grade III. Institutions would appear to have the discretionary power to do so.

Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work

Certificate of qualification in social work (CQSW)

Regulations for entry:

The relevant clauses in the CCETSW paper 15.1, Guidelines for Courses leading to the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work, dated February 1977, are as follows:

4.6 The Council reaffirms the educational requirements laid down in the Training Rules that a (non-graduate) student under the age of 25 years shall have five 'O' level

passes or their equivalents, or hold such other educational or professional qualifications or supply such other evidence of ability to benefit from the particular course as the university or other establishment providing the course may approve.

Numbers at entry, 1980/1

Total	Graduate Entry	Undergraduate Entry	Non-graduate Entry
3761	1459	322	1980

Appraisal

CCETSW leaflet 2 lays out in a chart what this can mean in practice. (Those aged 20+ without the formal educational qualifications cited above are eligible for a one year qualifying course, if they have had relevant experience and they have completed a two-year social studies course.) For those over 25 without formal educational qualifications there are three possibilities. For the 25+ with family commitments there is provision for them to qualify after a three-year course. Those over 25 with a good general education are eligible for a two-year qualifying course provided they have relevant experience. Those over 30 are also eligible for the two-year course but they may not be required to have had any experience. For three categories of potential students therefore there are provisions for entry without the formal educational qualifications usually required and implicitly there is provision for experience to be accredited for admission. To put this in perspective, in 1980 there were 55 two-year courses with 1882 students on them and four three-year courses for non-graduates with 98 students in all out of a total of 3761 CQSW students in 140 courses.

Eligibility is one thing; a place on a course is another. In heavy black type against academic requirements for non-graduates the pamphlet states 'students need to be able to perform beyond 'A' level or comparable standards and high academic as well as personal demands are made on students'.

The section headed 'Selection' includes this:

> '(selectors) will take into account an applicant's previous paid or voluntary experience, looking at the way the experience has been used and what has been gained from it. Knowledge gained from background reading in social work may be discussed'.

That shifts the emphasis from experience to what has been learned from experience. It also indicates the relatively sharp focus of CCETSW's procedures as conceived specifically for the selection and training of men and women for social work. So

when selectors are considering candidates on the basis of some written evidence and interview, experiential learning can be evaluated consistently against the professional skills and knowledge expected of qualified social workers.

Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work

Certificate in Social Service (CSS)

Regulations for entry:

The relevant courses in the CCETSW Paper 9.5, Regulations and Guidelines of Courses leading to the Certificate in Social Service (CSS), dated April 1980, are as follows in Appendix A:

4. Admissions to courses

(2) No person under the age of 21 years at the commencement of a course shall be admitted unless:

(a) He has attained in not fewer than five different subjects the folowing grades from the following examinations:

(i) grade A, B or C at the Ordinary Level in the General Certificate of Education of England and Wales;

(ii) grade A, B or C at the Ordinary Level in the Northern Ireland General Certificate of Education;

(iii) grade A, B or C at the Ordinary Grade in the Scottish Certificate of Education;

(iv) grade 1 in the Certificate of Secondary Education of England and Wales;

(v) grade 1 in the Northern Ireland Certificate of Secondary Education; or,

(b) He holds other educational or professional qualifications or supplies such other evidence of educational experience as the Council may approve.

Number at entry, 1980/1

1,078 on 25 courses.

Appraisal

CSS courses are open only to those who are experienced in some category of social services work, usually paid but it may be voluntary, and are nominated by an employing agency which undertakes to provide a study supervisor 'and can demonstrate that all other requirements for a CSS course will be met. It is within ... a two year part-time course and so these other criteria for eligibility are important...'; they must 'be able to provide evidence of academic and practical ability and motivation to benefit from the course'; and 'be able to provide evidence of capacity to cope with the demands of concurrent work and training'.

For those under and over 21 the regulation quoted enables those without formal educational qualifications to apply. As with CQSW the professional focus of the course means that whatever experiential learning may be brought into account when considering admissions there is a clear reference point. This is underlined by the requirements that an

employer nominates an applicant, that representatives from social service agencies form part of each interviewing panel. And the significance is highlighted by the employer's obligation to pay for the course and grant time for study to his employee.

Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work

Preliminary Certificate in Social Care (PCSC)

Regulations for entry:

The relevant clauses in the CCETSW Paper 16.1, Regulations and Guidelines for Courses leading to the Preliminary Certificate in Social Care, dated April 1980, are as follows:

> 104. All students must have reached compulsory school leaving age before starting the course. Although the course is intended primarily for school leavers, older students may be admitted where it is clear that the aims of the course are appropriate to their needs and interests ... Students who will be over 20 at the start of the course should not be admitted without the approval of the CCETSW adviser liaising with the college.
>
> 105. The Council does not prescribe academic entry requirements for the preliminary courses. However, educational qualifications are required for entry for such work. The Council, therefore, expects colleges to be satisfied that a candidate has the motivation and potential to obtain, during or after his preliminary course, such educational qualifications as will be required for the work and training to which he aspires. Particular attention must be given to the academic potential of those students who hope to proceed to work for which qualifying training is appropriate.
>
> 106. This formula deliberately retains a degree of flexibility for selection panels. It does, however, imply that candidates without the potential or motivation to obtain educational qualifications may be more appropriately referred for consideration for another course within the college or elsewhere. However, if the preliminary course is the only course in the area with an orientation towards a job in the caring services and jobs are available in the area for young people with limited academic attainment, the range of student accepted may be extended.
>
> 107. Besides considering academic attainment and potential, courses will wish to consider the applicant's personal qualities, his capacity to relate to other people and his motivation as shown in his application form, school reports and references and in interview. Entry requirements may also be influenced by the objectives laid down for the course and the likely availability of jobs at the end of it.

Numbers at entry, 1980/1

2661 students on 99 courses.

Appraisal

CCETSW Pamphlet 6 contains this section: 'WHO can apply?'. 'There are no educational entry requirements laid down by the Council, but some colleges have adopted their own. Most students have some CSEs or 'O' levels when they start.' The pamphlet also shows that most colleges offer opportunities for taking 'O' levels and sometimes 'A' levels as part of the course. In a section on Further Training the pamphlet says, 'later on, you might

wish to apply for a course leading to the Certification of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW), the recognised qualification for social workers throughout the United Kingdom'. It then quotes the minimum requirements of those under 25 and stresses the academic demands made by the CQSW courses themselves. It then says, 'you will also need five 'O' levels if you were under 21 and wished to apply for a course leading to the Certificate in Social Service (CSS)'.

So the general tenor of the text is that the usual run of formal examination successes are the most important criteria for admission. Quite how much leeway colleges consider they have will emerge in a later section. For the accreditation of experiential learning, since the interviewing panel includes someone from a local social service agency, there is the same clear reference mark for considering any experiential learning candidates may bring with them.

The National Nursery Examination Board

Regulations for entry

The NNEB issues a list of Colleges which run approved courses in preparation for the examination of the NNEB. This list reflects the balance between the number of places available to training and the anticipated number of Nursery Nurses needed for the service. It contains this: 'Application for admission to the courses should be made direct to the college concerned who will be able to supply additional information regarding such matters as fees, grants, availability of residential accommodation, entry requirements, etc.'.

Numbers at entry 1980/1

5,000, of which 655 were over age 23 and classified by NNEB as mature students.

Appraisal

The regulation means that institutions may admit to NNEB courses whoever they choose. The figures show that the majority of those admitted are not mature students. There is no analysis available for the 4345 students aged 16-23, but the presumption must be that the majority were school leavers. Assessment of experiential learning is hardly an issue then for the entry of the vast majority of students.

This is made explicit. The text at the head of list of colleges referred to also says, 'One year courses for mature students have now been phased out', though the position is more complex than that. Nine courses for mature entrants still exist but admission to them is confined to unqualified staff already in the employment of the local authority in question with a minimum of two to three years' experience. Admission to such courses is by selection made jointly by the employer and the college concerned.

The central office of NNEB continues to receive numbers of calls from mature people asking about the possibilities of finding an NNEB course which would accept them as students. Those 655 mature students were admitted by the 150 colleges offering NNEB courses. So unless there were considerable numbers of mature people applying for places, and unless colleges set out to assess the knowledge and skills acquired by those applicants, experiential learning is hardly an issue at all for the NNEB, save in one particular; the personal suitability of candidates for work with young children.

City and Guilds

Regulations for entry

The relevant clauses concerning eligibility for examinations are set out in City and Guilds Form 1, 1981-2, as follows:

9. Eligibility for Examinations.

(a) The conditions of entry to the examinations vary according to the nature of the subject and the educational and industrial requirements which apply and are set out in full in the subject regulations. It is the responsibility of candidates to acquaint themselves with the subject regulations and to make certain of their eligibility.

(b) In all subjects candidates are normally expected to have undertaken an appropriate course of study at a recognised centre. In certain subjects approval of courses by the Institute is required as indicated in the subject regulations (see Regulation 10 below).

(c) In most subjects entries from candidates who have valid reasons for not having attended an appropriate course at a recognised centre are permitted. In certain subjects, however, application for permission is required and applications must be made to the Institute not later than the date specified in the subject regulations. If an application is approved, the candidate will be notified by letter; such letter does not itself constitute an entry, it must be produced by the candidate when making entry to the examination at the examination centre.

Number at entry 1980/1

There were 410,000 candidates in the United Kingdom for Examinations on 400 different courses between October 1980 and September 1981. Published documents do not give figures for England and Wales only. Although the 410,000 includes candidates from prisons, borstals, companies such as Rolls Royce and the Central Electricity Board and from some schools offering Foundation courses, the vast majority are from Colleges of Further Education.

Appraisal

City and Guilds has 170 pamphlets each containing many syllabuses covering examinations in, for example, Electrical, Electronic and Mechanical Engineering, Hotels and Catering, Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy, Timber Trades and the Motor Industry. These regulations apply to all of them. Subject regulations sometimes specify prerequisites, so

that eligibility for a particular City and Guilds examination may be governed by performance in some other City and Guilds examination. But institutions can make their own decisions about these matters.

Generally, institutions have the power to enter for examinations candidates who in their judgement have the knowledge and skills required to succeed even though they may not have studied a course based on a syllabus designed specifically to prepare candidates for the examination. That holds good for candidates covered in paragraph 9(c) who have applied to the institute for permission and been granted it, for it is still the institution which makes the entry to examination at the Examination Centre.

However, the nature of City and Guilds examinations, based as they are on detailed prescribed syllabuses tend to mean that suitability for entrance to City and Guilds examinations is fairly narrowly defined.

Regional examining bodies

Regulations for entry

There are no general requirements for entry.

Numbers at entry

The records kept by various Regional Bodies do not enable a total figure to be computed for FE institutions. Two examples may give some idea of the extent of the provision. In the Midlands area the total number of subject entries for the West Midlands Board was 22,716, and for the East Midlands Board 49,666. In Wales there were 8,646 entries in all showing 1,066 for Building, 3,598 for Business Studies, 1,415 in Engineering and 1,168 in Agriculture.

Appraisal

These quotations from Examination Officers put things plainly.

'Regarding entry requirements, there are no specific qualifications for entry to courses and selection for these courses is left to the discretion of the College. Where an entry requirement is stated, it is not the examining body which applies it. That burden rests upon the school/college concerned, since the examining body does not conduct courses but offers an assessment facility for those courses. The majority of assessments offered are for young people in the 16-19 age range who have completed a period of secondary education and achieved standards which enable them to benefit from the course to be followed. Success in the examinations often depends on the completion of course practical work and the important criterion is not pre-course experience, or

this entry regulation is interpreted, discretion over entry lies either with an individual candidate or between a candidate and a school or college.

qualification, but in-course progress and achievement.'

'... there are no specific qualifications for entry to our courses and selection for these courses is left to the discretion of the college.'

And as is clear from a glance at any of the REB publications, their facilities are offered predominantly for young people at the first stage operative, craft and technician levels.

For the REBs therefore, as examining bodies catering for considerable numbers of 16-19 year old young people, the assessment of experiential learning is not seen as part of their professional function.

Royal Society of Arts

Regulations at Entry

The relevant clauses in the entry regulations as set out in the RSA 1982 document Single Subject Examinations including Group Awards are as follows:

> Entry Regulations
>
> Candidates of any age may be examined. Generally they may enter for subjects in any or all Stages and need not take the Elementary Stage of any subject before taking the Advanced Stage. All entries must be made through the Local Secretary of an RSA approved Examination Centre. Prospective candidates who are full-time or part-time students at schools or further education establishments, maintained or aided by a Local Education Authority, should submit their entries to the Local Secretary through the Principal of their educational establishment. Those attending private schools or colleges should seek the advice of the Principal of the establishment about entries and those not attending classes should write to the Local Secretary in their district - enclosing a stamped addressed envelope - to find out if he is willing to accept their entry.

Numbers at entry

RSA's records do not enable a figure to be quoted for the entries made through FE institutions.

Appraisal

This makes it clear that there is open access to courses at each of the three levels, Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced stages. There are no prerequisites laid down. Furthermore a candidate does not have to be following a course of study in order to sit RSA examinations. Anyone who considers that he or she has the knowledge and skills required to pass a particular RSA examination can simply submit forms and fees to a Local Secretary. For those who are full-time or part-time students at schools or further education establishments the implication is that the institution rather than the individual will determine whether an entry for a particular examination is appropriate. But whichever way

APPENDIX 3

Introductory Letter to Institutions and Questionnaire

This Appendix contains the introductory letter to institutions and one questionnaire - that relating to CNAA - as an example. All questionnaires followed a common format (see paragraph 6). The other questionnaires related to University Validated Degrees and Dip HE, BEC, TEC, CCETSW/CQSW, CCETSW/CSS, CCETSW/PCSC, NNEB, City and Guilds, Regional Examining Bodies, and RSA.

PSI

POLICY STUDIES INSTITUTE
1/2 Castle Lane, London SW1E 6DR.
Tel: 01-828 7055

A MAP OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING (FEU PROJECT RP67)

I am conducting an enquiry for the Further Education Curriculum Review and Development Unit entitled:

> Curriculum Opportunity; a map of experiential learning in access provisions to Higher and Further Education award bearing courses.

Experiential learning for this project means the knowledge and skills acquired through life and work experience and study which are not formally attested through any educational or professional certification.

The aims of the research are as follows:

i) To review the concept of experiential learning;

ii) To describe and appraise ways in which experiential learning is recognised for admission to award bearing courses up to and including first degree including those of the Open University, TEC, BEC, City and Guilds from Part II upwards, CCETSW, NNEB, RSA, Regional Examining Bodies etc. from a review of the documentary evidence contained in the rules and regulations for those courses;

iii) To establish the practice of institutions working under those regulations, through questionnaire and follow up visits to a sample of institutions;

iv) To enquire into the views of validating bodies and institutions of both regulations and current practice;

v) To make suggestions with respect to possible further developments in policy and practice.

I am working to a short schedule. I have to attempt to produce an Interim Report by the end of April 1982 and a Final Report by the end of July 1982.

This letter is to tell you that this enquiry has been funded and to ask for your help. I am all too well aware that requests for help at this particular time are bound to be heard with mixed feelings; concern about additional work, perhaps doubts about the value of the work in the first place. "Help" here does not mean burdening over-pressed administrative staff with requests for facts and figures. As under (ii) of the aims quoted, I shall obtain that direct from the validating and/or examining bodies. It does mean asking for statements of policy and description of procedures

Joint Presidents: The Lord Roll of Ipsden, KCMG, CB The Lord Seebohm
Chairman of Council: Sir Montague Finniston, FRS
Chairman of Research & Management Committee: Sir Charles Carter, FBA
Director: John Pinder, OBE
Deputy Director: Dr Michael Fogarty
Director (Administration & External Relations): Richard Davies

87

Council: Sir Montague Finniston FRS (Chairman), Dr. M. Abrams, Professor Dr. F. A. M. Alting von Geusau, K. W. Baker MP, Sir Donald Barron, Sir John K. Boynton MC DL, John Burgh CB, Sir Charles Carter FBA, Sir Kenneth Corfield, K. Durham, M. H. Fisher, Jean Floud, R. Georis, Robin Guthrie, J. H. Harvey-Jones, R. Huws Jones CBE, J. Lyons, Sir Ronald McIntosh KCB, Professor J. N. Morris, Sara Morrison, Sir Richard O'Brien, M. V. Posner, G. Radice MP, The Hon. David Sieff, B. Stanley, Sir Douglas Wass, Professor G. L. Williams

as indicated in (iii) of the aims. I hope the potential value of the work is convincing; that in mapping experiential learning an important service is being developed for students in the future who may wish to enrol in any of the courses mentioned.

I attach several copies of questionnaires. A separate questionnaire is used for each award bearing body. May I ask you to distribute them to the appropriate people with the request that they be returned to me as soon as possible but no late than Friday, the 26th of March. Will you also complete the Staff Contract List, and return it to me directly.

A little later I shall be working out a programme of visits to a sample of follow-up institutions taking into account differing sizes, regional distribution and, if appropriate, curricula variations. If my sample includes your college, I hope you will not mind if I phone, asking if you will agree in principle, so that arrangements can be made.

If at any time there is any query concerning this enquiry which anyone wishes to raise, my extension number in PSI is 201. Lucy Hausner, who is secretary for this enquiry, is on extension 281. If there is no reply on either extension, a message can be left with the switchboard, and one of us will call back as soon as possible.

As you will have deduced, it will not be easy to complete this enquiry in the time allowed. I do not need to underline the urgency of it in the present circumstances, so in thanking you in advance for whatever help you can offer, may I ask you and your colleagues to respond as fast as possible without, I hope, being over-pressing.

A Final Report suitable for publication by the FEU will be written and copies will be distributed free in the usual way.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely

Norman Evans
SENIOR FELLOW

Name of Institution: (please complete).....

Awarding Authority: Council for National Academic Awards

A Map of Experiential Learning (FEU Project RP67)

Introduction

This questionnaire is part of an enquiry into the policies and practices adopted by institutions within the awarding authoritiy's regulations for taking account of experiential learning in making decisions about admissions of applicants.

Experiential learning for this project means the knowledge and skills acquired through life and work experience and study which are not formally attested through any educational or professional certification.

May I ask for this questionnaire to be completed by the principal, academic registrar, secretary to the academic board, departmental head, course leader or admission tutor, as appropriate.

Admissions

The relevant clauses in the admission requirements for the Council for National Academic Awards as set out in the Principles and Regulations for the Award of the Council's First Degrees and Diploma of Higher Education, 1979 are as follows:

8.11-12. Admission of students who do not meet the normal minimum entry requirements.

8.11 An institution may admit a student to the beginning of a course who either lacks the normal course entry qualifications or their equivalents, or who does not meet the course age requirement, provided that the student can present evidence which, in the opinion of the institution, indicates that such admission satisfies the Council's Principles for the admission of a student.

8.11.2 The admission of a student under 8.11 shall be at the discretion of the institution where the normal minimum course entry requirements are those of 8.13 or their equivalents.

8.11.4 An admitting institution must ensure that the proportion of admissions to a course under 8.11 is not so large as to affect significantly the nature and presentation of the course.

8.12 The Council may approve course regulations such that a specified level of maturity and experience is recognised as a normal qualification for entry to the beginning of the course. Before approving such a proposal, the Council must be satisfied that:

(a) The design of the course will be enable students to attain a final level appropriate for the proposed award; and,

(b) The proposed procedure for the selection of students is adequate for this purpose.

College Policies

What policies have been formally adopted at any of the differing levels indicated in the following sections for taking formal recognition of experiential learning within the discretionary powers given to institutions? The academic work

of colleges is organised in so many different ways that some of these sections may not apply. Please complete those sections which seem appropriate to your institution. Wherever possible, please quote from official papers.

By Principal at Executive Level

By Academic Board/Academic Council

By Faculty

By Department

By Course Tutor or Course Committees or Admission Tutors

College Practices

Please describe the procedures followed in admissions to courses showing how experiential learning is considered as a factor in making decisions about admissions.

It would be helpful if the account indicates how the experiential learning is identified (at interview, through interview work, through written work, through references etc.) how it is assessed and how it is evaluated as coming within the discretionary powers offered by the validating body.

APPENDIX 4

Assessment of Experiential Learning

There are three groups of requirements for an attempt to accredit the skills and knowledge of the candidates for Non-Standard Entry: the candidates have to be attracted to make applications; methods of assessment need to seek out potential as well as establish performance; and assessment procedures need to be designed so as to reveal, rather than conceal, what a candidate is able to offer. Applications are unlikely to be made unless potential students believe that there is some point in them doing so. They will not believe it unless they can find procedures which appear to relate to their own circumstances. So what methods can be developed?

Traditional examinations even when supplemented with interviews will not meet the requirements. Necessarily they prescribe in advance what knowledge and skills may be demonstrated. For non-traditional applicants it is more helpful to put things around the other way; to invite applicants to demonstrate whatever knowledge and skills they think will support their claims for admission. Perhaps the best way of doing this is to request a fully documented educational autobiography which includes not only a record of formal education and whatever recognised qualifications were gained, but an account of all additional learning showing how the knowledge and skills were acquired. Wherever possible examples of work could be attached as supporting evidence to demonstrate attainment in a particular field, such as a memorandum written as part of an assignment at work, an analysis of a production process, or a recommendation for some innovation written privately, reports of meetings of a private reading or discussion group, and so on. The names of referees should also be given so that verification is possible of every stage of the autobiography recounted.

An education autobiography can thus constitute a body of evidence submitted for consideration, assembled at the initiative of the candidate. It provides an opportunity for the person to review their own development, identify key stages, and account for whatever they claim to know and be able to do. It provides an admissions tutor with a dossier far more informative than the usual application paper. If there is material where the tutor does not feel competent to make a judgement, he or she can refer it to a colleague for an opinion. The evidence is likely to offer helpful clues to a candidate's potential as well as performance. An educational autobiography appears to meet the requirements.

However it may not. One of the difficulties inherent in examining procedures is that they do not always enable candidates to reveal what they know and so do themselves justice. That can be true of an educational autobiography if its preparation is left to the applicants with a set of written instructions. Instructions and guidance must be given and the following framework offers a helpful structure.

Each student needs to be helped to move through the following stages.

1. Introduction to the general idea of the assessment of experiential learning and to the requirements laid upon students.
2. Identification of previous learning experience.
3. Sorting and clarifying those learning experiences.
4. Describing previous learning.
5. Documenting previous learning.
6. Demonstrating previous learning.
7. Evaluating previous learning.
8. Recording and interpreting previous learning.

Students can be helped to move through these stages by themselves, but it is far better for this sequence to be worked through by a student group in a 'class' which works as a seminar led by a trained member of staff.

Many adults and young people as well have a chronic lack of self-confidence when approaching educational institutions. As self-confidence becomes stronger, so the ability strengthens to use the knowledge and skills they have. For some, self-confidence comes from success in producing pieces of work by themselves. For others, tutorial support is essential to sustain their efforts. With regard to an educational biography, this means either a formal class or tutorials, or a mixture of both, as the ideal. In a class students learn from each other and gain confidence in what they themselves have to offer. Under tutorial guidance they often come to recognise with surprise that they know more than they thought they did.

As they are helped to order, analyse and formulate what they know, their confidence grows, the quality of their thinking and their powers of expression improve. Since it is all building on what they already know and what they have experienced, motivation is therefore strong and they work extremely hard to produce the best possible autobiography. This amounts to a preparation and admission course as an element in an admission-procedure to complement whatever other steps admission tutors take before coming to a decision about offering places. It may seem an onerous undertaking as an additional academic assignment for an institution. But it is an effective approach to accrediting knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education.

There are three different though related functions, for staff involved.

The first is for staff who work as facilitators and seminar leaders with students as they move through the stages listed. These staff are acting as general consultants; they are

likely to find themselves acting as friendly guides and advisors.

The second task is different. This is the job of making an independent and academic evaluation of the evidence of learning submitted and answering the question - what it is worth? It is always advisable for this to be undertaken by staff who play no part in the preparation of evidence which is the business of the seminar and its staff leader.

Broadly speaking there are two ways of answering that question - what is it worth? It can be assessed either by comparison with what is expected from qualified applicants or students on particular courses or in more general terms for capacity for further study at an appropriate level. Each approach can be used for admission to the beginning of a course or for admission with advanced standing, remission of course.

Most admission tutors will claim that they always make their judgements on the basis of a combination of both whether candidates are formally qualified or not. For the assessment of experiential learning it is as well to be clear about the difference between the two and of the different criteria implied.

The American example in Appendix 5 shows Prior learning assessed for academic credit - (admission with advanced standing) according to the content of existing courses. Many American institutions use the more general approach.

The choice of method is obviously influenced by the nature of the courses an applicant wishes to study. There is no golden rule. However there is a general point related to each approach or combinations of both.

Our daily experience of learning does not fall neatly into the discipline areas by which much formal study tends to be organised. There is an inter or intra discipline quality about it. To a greater or lesser extent this is bound to be true for any who present themselves for the assessment of their prior learning; the knowledge and skills they bring with them. It often can mean that while they may not have mastery over the content normally expected for a particular study, they may well have the capacity to undertake that study; they can be ready for it despite superficial appearances. Assessment procedures need to take account of this.

In between those two tasks generally facilitating the preparation of evidence and evaluating it, lies another. It may be undertaken by seminar leaders, but never by the evaluators. It is to provide expert support and guidance to a student so that the evidence he or she is preparing is appropriately organised and presented. The student working on evidence of learning in business studies or literature or social science or computer studies and so on

needs help from academic staff with expertise in his or her particular area of study. Given any group of students it almost certainly means that the seminar staff leader will not have sufficient expertise to help all the students in their chosen areas and will need a panel of experts to help.

For many academic staff this can be an unfamiliar business. Many in further and adult education have experience which is fairly closely related, as have those in higher education who teach on some of the more innovative courses. But some staff development and training is essential as preparation for this kind of work with students.

For institutions too this can be an unfamiliar business. Perhaps the most important prerequisite for undertaking it is some firm commitment to its development from the most senior level. And it is in everyone's best interests for the administration to be involved from the beginning in partnership with academic staff.

APPENDIX 5

Institutional Collaboration - Example from the United States

Compact for Lifelong Educational Opportunities, Philadelphia P.A.

CLEO was established to offer a unified career and educational service to adults. CLEO is a consortium of 38 Delaware Valley institutions of higher education which have joined together in an unprecedented collaborative effort to link higher education with the workplace.

CLEO functions as a centralised information agency providing information on the courses and other educational services available in the colleges and universities in the consortium. It organises publicity to attract adults to make greater use of the education service. It administers and scores CLEP tests for those who wish to use them.

It also provides academic and career counselling and acts as a central referral agency for the colleges and universities in membership. It acts as a regional development centre for the evaluation and assessment of experiential learning. And it fosters cooperation between education and business and industry.

The Evaluation of learning derived from life and work experience begins with an introduction to the handbook 'A Guide to Portfolio Development'. This document, issued by CLEO, establishes the basic principles:

> '... what the student knows is more important than how he or she learned it'.
>
> 'if a student can demonstrate that his or her knowledge and skills are reasonably comparable to what the college trained student knows, then equal credit will be awarded'.

This demonstration is achieved by the 'Portfolio', which is 'a means for organising prior experience into a manageable form for assessment'. The basis for this organisation lies in the declared 'competencies' which are intended learning outcomes for the course in a college programme selected as being the equivalent learning experience to that which the student claims to have had outside college and for which credit is sought. Students have to demonstrate to the satisfaction of assessors appointed by CLEO what has been learned and what degree of learning has been attained, and the 'Guide' referred to lays down the structure for this to be done.

Normally two assessors deal with a portfolio, one from the college from which credit is sought, and one from another higher education institution. The standard means of assessment is by interview, in which the student is called upon to explicate and defend the

contents of the portfolio. Written tests may also be used if necessary, and sometimes visits are made to work sites if they are the location of the experience in question.

The process of compiling the folio, and its supporting documentation, is an educative process in itself. It requres students to be hignly motivated, articulate and verbally competent, and capable of displaying not only knowledge but also the ability to analyse and express its significance. The average student takes between four to six months to produce a satisfactory document; students may work on their own or may enrol in a 'Portfolio Development Workshop', and they have access to the Director of Assessment at CLEO for guidance.

FEU PUBLICATIONS

Curriculum opportunity is one of a number of FEU publications intended to inform teachers and others and to stimulate professional discussion about matters of concern to the FE service. Other FEU publications include:

Day release: a desk study	January 1980
Further opportunities in focus: a study of bridging courses for women	July 1980
Loud and clear: a study of curriculum dissemination in further and higher education	August 1980
Vocational preparation	January 1981
Curriculum control: a review of major styles of curriculum design in FE	March 1981
Leadership in learning: the reflexive learning of a staff group	December 1981
How do I learn?: an experimental programme to introduce young people and their teachers to the many ways of learning	December 1981
Profiles: a review of issues and practice in the use and development of student profiles	September 1982
The changing face of FE: personal perspectives on the changes that have taken place in FE over the last decade	December 1982
A basis for choice: report of a study group on post-16 pre-employment courses 2nd Edition	December 1982

Copies of these documents (which are free of charge) are obtainable, while stocks last, from the Publications Despatch Centre, Department of Education and Science, Honeypot Late, Canons Park, Stanmore, Middlesex, HA7 1AZ. Telephone No. 01-952 2366 Ext. 503.

A complete list of FEU publications is also available from the same address.